

The House

and its Builder

Samuel Cox D.D.

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THE HOUSE AND ITS BUILDER

With other Discourses

A BOOK FOR THE DOUBTFUL

BY
SAMUEL COX, D.D.

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"SALVATOR MUNDI," &c., &c.

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TO MY FRIEND
JESSE HIND, ESQ.

IN MEMORY OF
MUCH KINDNESS AND MANY SERVICES.



PREFACE.

THIS little book, or booklet, like the landlord's chest in The Deserted Village, is "contrived a double debt to pay."

First, it includes the last ten Sermons I have been allowed to preach, the only sermons I was able to preach during the last six months of a pastorate extending over a quarter of a century, and of a ministry which has lasted some forty years. My Congregation, as was natural perhaps, seeing that it consisted of personal and attached friends, expressed a strong desire to have these Sermons printed, that they might read and retain them in a permanent form. With their request I very gladly comply, as indeed I should be happy to comply with any request they could make of me; for I owe them much, and love them much.

And, then, I am not without hope that at least some of these discourses may prove useful to many who did not hear them. In the introduction to Sermon II. I have related the curious—and, to me, impressive—combination of circumstances that led me to take up the theme discussed in Sermons I.–VI., while the opening sentences of Sermon X. explain how I came to follow them up with a final appeal to the reason, conscience, and charity of those who had listened to that series with interest.

These seven discourses are all, as will be seen, addressed to those who have been infected by the doubts which are in the very air of the time, doubts which every thoughtful mind is, sooner or later, compelled to face. In the course of my life I have met with so many young people who have been, unwillingly and reluctantly, driven into scepticism by the hard and narrow dogmas in which they were bred, or by the pitiless severity with which these dogmas have been thrust upon them, that I have felt it my duty to devote myself to their service, and to consider again and again how I could best serve them. And hence I held it to be a happy accident, or, rather, a happy providence, that I was led, by no design or intention of my own, to conclude my ministry with words addressed to them.

In these discourses I have used arguments and

followed a line of thought which, in many private conversations, have proved useful and effective with those whose minds were clouded with doubt, though they desired nothing so much as to see the light and walk in it. And I found them not less effective when they were reduced to form, and preached to a Congregation in which there were many young and inquiring minds. Hence I indulge the hope that they may still prove useful now that they are addressed to a wider circle. I can at least say this for them: that they have served to recover to an active and cheerful faith in the Father of all men, and the Saviour of all, some who once found themselves alone in the world, without a God whom they could love, or a hope which they could cherish and in which they could confide. And I trust and pray that they may yet do that great service for many more.

These Sermons are not addressed to those who are either hostile to religion or indifferent to it; but to that large and increasing class to whom the loss of a reasonable faith is as a sentence of death, who long to believe and yet find the dogmas in which they have been reared growing more and more incredible to them; and who forbode with a sinking and reluctant heart that they may be compelled to renounce the faith they once held. By

its timidity, its narrowness and hardness, its controversies and divisions, the Church is largely answerable—more answerable, I fear, than that advance of scientific thought and method which it too often condemns as alone responsible—for the existence of this class ; and those of us who love the Church, and believe that it carries the fortunes of the world, while yet we see and confess how much of the existing unbelief it has to answer for, are bound to do what we can for those who, through no fault of their own, but rather by our faults and defects, are being driven from the true home and sanctuary of the soul.

One other reason may be alleged for the publication of these discourses. They contain an exposition of one of the noblest passages in the writings of St. Paul, Romans viii. 18–27, a more detailed and complete exposition than any I can find on my shelves : and this may prove welcome even to those who have long since faced their doubts and fought them down.

THE HOLME, HASTINGS.



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I.

THE HOUSE AND ITS BUILDER.

"Every house is builded by some one; but he that built all things is God."—HEB. iii. 4.



AD the house a builder, or did it build itself? This is a question which is occupying many minds, many tongues, many pens, just now, and to which various answers are given, though only two of them seem worth considering. If we say, "The house built itself," that, clearly, is a straightforward answer to the question, however unsatisfactory it may prove on examination. And if we say, "The house was

built by God," that, again, is clearly an answer to the question, and an answer which seems at once to commend itself to our common sense, however disputable it may be. But if we have nothing more to say than "We do not know," clearly we do not answer the question at all; we do not even shew it to be unanswerable; we simply admit our incapacity to answer it: and though that may be a sufficiently interesting fact to us, it has no interest for the world at large, which cares very little for us, but cares a great deal for the question we have raised.

Unless, therefore, we choose to occupy the Agnostic attitude of nescience—which, however, is the only position which some minds can occupy, for a time, since uncertainty of knowledge makes suspense a duty—we have to choose between the answers of the Materialist and of the Theist. The Materialist says, "The house built itself;" the Theist says, "He who built all things is God." The issue is, therefore, clear and plain. It is between these two answers to the question which lies at the root of all philosophy and all religion that we really have to choose. No third course, if at least we are to answer the question at all, is open to us. To ascribe the building of the house, the making

of the universe, to Evolution, for example, is simply to evade and confuse the question in debate, not to answer it ; for evolution, or development, can be nothing more than the method, or one of the methods, by which the Builder wrought, whether that builder be a Person or a Force, and to determine the method in which, or the tool with which, the Architect wrought is not to decide who the Architect was. No, after all our discussions, all our evasions, we are brought back to a simple alternative, and *must* either say, "The house built itself," or say, "Every house is builded by some one ; and he that built all things is God."

Which of these answers *we* shall prefer, there can be no doubt ; for we accept the teaching of the New Testament as a revelation of the mind and will of God, as the supreme authority in all questions of ethics and religion. And yet it *may*—in these days of doubt, indeed, in which this fundamental question is being discussed in our very novels and newspapers and magazines, it *must*—be worth our while to consider what reasons we can assign for our preference. We cannot simply appeal to the authority of the Bible when its authority is disputed, or even denied. Nor do we shew any want of reverence

for Holy Writ in appealing to the dictates of reason, and searching out arguments for the faith that is in us. Revelation itself must be reasonable; for reason must be competent to judge its credentials, if not its contents; we cannot bow to its authority until we are convinced of its authority. And how can any revelation prove, to reason, its right to teach irrationally? Any authority which appeals to reason for its right to speak asserts itself to be essentially rational. For why appeal to reason, if reason is to distrust and defy itself?

Is not my text itself an appeal to reason? Is there not a *logical* movement and force in the words, "Every house is builded by some one; but he who built all things is God"? And if the Bible argues with us, may we not, are we not bound to use our reason on its arguments, and to consider what is their force and weight?

On the other hand, let us bear in mind that to reason on any theme is not necessarily to prove it. Proof is only one of many forms in which reason works. And there are more kinds of proof than one. We cannot prove the existence of Julius Cæsar, no, nor even that of Napoleon Buonaparte, in the same way that we

can verify an arithmetical sum or demonstrate a mathematical problem—so as to close every loophole for doubt. We cannot prove that the four Gospels were written by the four Evangelists whose names they bear, or that Homer composed the ballads collected in the *Iliad*, or even that Shakespeare wrote the dramas attributed to his pen, with the same irrefragable and unquestionable certainty with which we demonstrate that two and two make four, or that all the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. Even the larger conclusions of Science—conclusions summed up in such words as Gravitation and Evolution, or in the current theories of Light, Colour, and Sound—are justly called “speculations,” although no sane man will deny them; they are but working hypotheses which we accept because those who are able to judge assure us that they most adequately explain the phenomena they cover.

And in theology we meet with the same difficulties, and the same limitations, that we encounter in Science, in Literature, in History. In one of his later poems, Browning satirizes

Man, with the narrow mind (who) must cram inside
His finite God's infinitude,—earth's vault
He bids comprise the heavenly far and wide,

Since man may claim a right to understand
What passes understanding !

But it is only men of a narrow mind who advance this tremendous and preposterous claim. If we have any breadth and compass of thought we shall admit that there is much in the heavenly far and wide which we cannot comprehend ; that even the simplest facts of which we are most sure are based on mysteries which we cannot hope to fathom. We shall frankly admit that we cannot *prove* the existence of God any more than we can prove our own existence ; that we can no more *prove* that we shall live again than that we have never lived before. But we shall remember, for our comfort, what one of our best thinkers has said, that we cannot, in this strict sense, *prove* anything that is much worth believing.¹ We shall be content with the working hypotheses which most adequately explain the facts and phenomena with which we have to deal, and neither attempt to cram, nor pretend that we have crammed, God's infinitude into our finite, or comprehend, with our narrow minds, the heavenly far and wide. For, after all,

¹ For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven.

TENNYSON'S *Tiresias*.

What do we see? Each man a span
Of some few yards before his face.
Can that the whole wide plan explain?
Ah, no : consider it again.

Now if we come to the question before us in this humble and reasonable spirit, conscious that, at the best, our explanation of "the whole wide plan" of the universe must be a tentative and inadequate hypothesis, although the best we can frame, I do not think we shall have any grave difficulty in reaching our decision between the materialistic and the theistic answers to it, or even in arriving at an hypothesis in which we shall be content to rest.

The Materialist says virtually, "The house built itself;" *i.e.*, he sees nothing but matter and force in the whole universe—these two, matter and force, being, perhaps, only two different forms or aspects under which we conceive the ultimate fact of the universe. This, at least, is his working hypothesis. He sees no need of a Builder, a Maker, a Creator. The inter-action of force and matter, by a process of slow and gradual evolution, is sufficient, in his judgment, to account for all that is, even up to the mind of man, and its craving for immortality.

Is this, then, a satisfactory, an adequate, work-

ing hypothesis? Does it cover and explain all the facts?

To begin with, it in no way accounts for the *origin* of matter and force even. Nor does it account for the existence of law and order in the universe, or for the origin of life, thought, conscience. It does not prove, it only assumes, that matter is capable of being developed into life, and that the merely physical may rise, unaided, into the mental, and the mental into the moral life. These are very large assumptions, very grave omissions; and till these assumptions are proved, and these omissions supplied, it is but reasonable that the materialistic hypothesis should be pronounced inadequate and defective by Science as well as by Religion. For science assumes an intelligible order in the universe which it can discover and formulate: but how should it be intelligible if there were no Intelligence to produce and maintain it? Science *has* pronounced the hypothesis inadequate by the mouth of one of her favourite and most honoured sons, John Stuart Mill, who had to sweep away the prejudices of a lifetime before he could give as his final and deliberate verdict, "There is a large balance in favour of the probability of creation by Intelligence."

Professor Huxley, again, has declared that "the antagonism of science is not to religion, but to the heathen survivals and the bad philosophy under which religion herself is often crushed," and has held up a saying recorded by one of the Hebrew prophets (Micah vi. 8) as embodying "the perfect ideal of religion," although that saying postulates the existence of a God whose character is the standard of justice and mercy, to whom therefore our obedience is due, and with whom we may and ought to walk in a constant and living sympathy and communion. While Dr. Asa Grey, the foremost disciple of Darwin, is quite sure that the tendency of true science is "not toward the omnipotence of Matter, but to the omnipotence of Spirit."

I am not surprised that these great representatives of "those who know" should evince some discontent with the purely materialistic hypothesis, and pronounce in favour of creation by Intelligence: for if we assume that "He who built all things is God," that the universe was created, and is sustained and ruled, by a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness and power, we get at least a less inadequate, a more satisfactory, solution of our problem; a solution which does account for the origin of matter and force;

which, while it leaves full scope for the play of evolution, also explains the origin of life, of thought, of conscience, of the whole ethical and spiritual man, in whom the universe flowers and is summed up.

That this hypothesis also has its difficulties I frankly admit : for how else could any discussion and debate have arisen ? How, indeed, should finite man, with his limited, if not narrow mind, who sees but a few yards before his face, frame *any* hypothesis of the origin of the universe which is not inadequate, which leaves no room for doubt or debate ? And with one of its difficulties—the shadow which the existence of so much pain, imperfection, suffering, throws on the perfect goodness of the Creator and Ruler of the world—I hope to deal, as best I may, in my next discourse. But, for the present, we are concerned only with the *existence* of the Builder of the universe, not with his character. And I am bold to say that, taken simply as a working hypothesis of the origin of all things, it is far more reasonable to postulate a creative Intelligence than to assume the omnipotence of Matter and Force ; to believe that the house had a Builder than to believe that the House built itself.

“But may not Matter and Force be eternal?” it

may be asked ; “and may not the present universe have been evolved by the play of force on matter ?” Well, that which is to have an end must, it is reasonable to suppose, have had a beginning. And Science predicts the end of the physical world as confidently as any of the Hebrew or Christian prophets. But if the whole solar system is to be burned up, whether by frost or by fire ; if the whole scene of human existence is to run to this dismal end, and there is to be no resurrection of the dead, no such change in the life of man as shall adapt him to new, larger, fairer scenes, that surely is a reflection on the doctrine of evolution and the whole materialistic hypothesis more terrible and fatal than any but itself could allege against itself ! Get rid of God and of immortality, and what cruel and monstrous force have you left which thus devours its own children, which lifts the whole round of Nature, through long centuries, into ever nobler forms and finer qualities of life, only to undo its own work, and to overwhelm all its fair productions in an all-embracing and relentless catastrophe ! Is *that* a consummation to be wished, to be credited even until all more adequate and hopeful forecasts have wholly failed us ? If Science *were* to bring such an indictment as this against the Nature

which it would have us study and reverence, must not we bring an indictment against Science herself in the name of Humanity, and refuse to listen to her voice, let her *discharm* us never so wisely of all courage and hope? ¹

Such considerations as these may well lead us to accept, they make it more reasonable to accept, the higher, the creative, hypothesis, and to believe that He who built all things is God ; to assent to Emerson's conclusion when, with clear good sense, he points out the indications of self-conscious forethought in the universe—"the preparation made for man in the slow and secular changes and melioration of the surface of the planet, *his house built, the grounds laid out, the cellar stocked.*" And yet, remember, they *prove* nothing in the strict sense. They are only hints, indications, arguments, which incline the reason to fall on their side. They are not final ; they are not conclusive. If they satisfy *us*, they may not satisfy others. They carry no authority

¹ Even Cicero had something better to offer us than this:—"It is not by some random chance that we have been created. There is beyond all doubt some mighty Power which watches over the race of man, and which does not produce a creature whose doom it is, after having exhausted all other woes, to fall at last into the unending woe of death."

but their own weight. If we would be sure of God, we must take Plato's advice, and "look within;" we must fall back—as my text virtually bids us fall back—on our intuitions, on the dictates of common sense, on the motions and emotions of our own hearts, on our personal experience of God above all. And we have a right to listen to these voices from within; for, as Pascal has said, "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not understand;" while Buckle the historian admits, "The emotions are as much a part of us as the understanding; they are as truthful; they are as likely to be right. Though their view is different from that of the understanding, it is not capricious. They obey fixed laws; they follow an orderly and uniform course; they run in sequences: they have their logic and method of inference."

"*Every house is builded by some one:*" does not that express a natural motion, an intuitive conviction, of our minds? Is it not the plain dictate of common sense? Does it not embody a constant experience? Let any man bring a mind unsophisticated and unconfused to this Verse, and will he not at once admit that *Every made thing has*, and must have, *a maker*, every house a builder? Well, but Science admits—it

is, I believe, one of its latest and most admired discoveries—that even the ultimate atoms of which the universe is composed, so far at least as they have been reached, bear every sign and mark of manufacture. And if that be so, are we to shut off our common sense as we contemplate this strange surprising fact, lest it should lead us to unwelcome conclusions? Are we to let these manufactured things say to us “We had no manufacturer,” these made things “We had no maker,” this built-up house “I had no builder”? Confuse and bewilder the mind as we may by overmuch brooding on the mysteries which underlie the facts of nature and of human life, or on the speculations by which men attempt to solve these mysteries, does it not instinctively and persistently fall back on the conviction that, where there is design, there must be a designer; that the intelligible implies Intelligence; that every made thing must have had a Maker: that, in fine, every house, every structure, implies a builder?

Beyond this point I doubt whether reason by itself can conduct us. If we would go further, if we would say more than that the existence of an intelligent and almighty Creator is the most adequate explanation of the facts and mysteries

of the universe, we must betake ourselves to faith and to experience. "*By faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that that which is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear." And faith is always a venture, though not an unreasonable venture. For what of irrational is there in saying: "The very constitution of my nature compels me to accept, as the most reasonable explanation of the universe, the hypothesis which assumes the existence of an infinite and almighty Creator: this hypothesis is confirmed by the teaching of a vast majority of the wisest and best men who have ever lived: it meets the deepest wants and satisfies the profoundest cravings of my heart: to love and serve Him—*i.e.*, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him—is confessedly the highest rule of life and has produced the noblest characters the world has ever seen: and therefore I heartily accept this hypothesis as true. I will believe in this God. I will obey his will, so far as I am able, and can discover what his will is." *That*, so far from being unreasonable, seems to me the most reasonable course a man can take.

And if he take it frankly and sincerely, it will not be long before he will enter upon a series of

inward experiences which will in every way confirm his faith. The will of God will grow both clearer to him and more dear. His conscience will respond more happily and promptly to its demands. He will come more and more to be at peace within himself, and with the world around him. New cravings, loftier aspirations, brighter hopes, will purge, elevate, and refine his spirit. He will have the witness within himself, not only that there is a God, but that this God is his Friend and Helper. Men *have* thus risen into an inward, purifying, ennobling, communion with God, and that even when they held no clear and open revelation of his will. The best men, the greatest teachers, of Greece and Rome, for instance, passed through this happy experience, and many of them have left behind them words which still make the devoutest Christian heart throb with joy and wonder, and heroic patterns of virtue which often put us to shame: for in every race, and in every age, God has been found of those who sought Him; and *we* may still find Him both in their words and in their lives. And if every house is built by some one, must not this inward organism, this spiritual structure, of wisdom, trust, aspiration, hope, joy, have had a Builder? Can its builder have been any

one less than He who built and builds all things ?

We find God most of all in that revelation of Himself which He has given through Jesus Christ, who came "to shew us the Father," to prove that God is our Father, by shewing us how far He would go, and how much He would both do and bear, in order to save us from our sins and to bring us back to Himself. And if we have believed that God was in Christ, reconciling the world, reconciling *us*, unto Himself, are we not conscious that a power not our own has been at work within us, and working both for redemption and for righteousness ? Are we not sure that his Spirit has been teaching us lessons of wisdom we could not have learned for ourselves, redeeming us from a guilt we could not have atoned for and from the yoke of habits we could not have shaken off ; strengthening us in hours of weakness, comforting us in hours of sorrow and defeat, and brightening hours of toil with hopes too fair to have sprung from the broken and troubled fountains of our earthly cravings and desires ? Does any true child of God feel that he could have made himself even what he is, or that he could have done even the little good he has done in his own strength ?

On the contrary, does he not feel, and thankfully confess, that he owes all that is good in himself to God, all his love for truth and wisdom, all his convictions, aspirations, hopes? If our characters have in any measure been built on larger fairer lines, if we have any hope of becoming what we fain would be, do we not gratefully acknowledge, does not mere honesty compel us to acknowledge, that it is not we who have built ourselves up, but that our builder is God?

There are many fair things in the world, but none so fair as a good man. And shall not He who builds all things build the best things? To Him we owe all that is best in ourselves and in the world around us. Our own experience of Him, and of what He has done for us, is our surest proof that He *is*, and that He is at work, and that He loves us, and will never cease from the work of his grace upon us until we are satisfied with his likeness. And we have a right to trust these inward emotions and experiences. They are as much a part of us as reason itself. They have a logic of their own. They are as truthful. They are as likely to be right. And when they combine with the dictates of reason, when they confirm and certify the conviction

that the existence of an intelligent and almighty Creator is the most rational and adequate explanation of the universe, why *should* we distrust them? Let us not distrust them, but say with the full assurance of faith, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:" let us render Him the praise, the love, the obedience, which are his due.





II.

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL:

A WORKING HYPOTHESIS.

"For the creation was made subject to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."—ROMANS viii. 20, 21.



DO not propose to expound these profound and pregnant words as yet. Let us reserve that pleasant task till we meet again. For the present I wish simply to say a few words on a large general theme which they suggest. And, perhaps, I shall best introduce this theme by

telling you how I was led to frame that wish.

Only last week I received a note from a clergyman's widow in which she confided to me that a close friend of hers had turned agnostic because he "could not reconcile the goodness of God with the pain and suffering of which the world is full," and asked me what books she had better put into his hands. During my recent holiday in Devonshire I met two or three intelligent and thoughtful young people who were grievously tormented on precisely the same score, and begged me, if I could, to give them some reasonable answer to their doubts. Just before I started I received a letter from a learned and erudite author, who has written or edited a whole shelf-full of valuable books, in which letter he said, "I feel constrained to address you on a matter that is no merely idle speculation, but of life and death to young and eager intellects for whom I am responsible;" this matter of life and death proving to be the very same difficulty of reconciling all that is amiss in the world around us "with the absolute goodness and supremacy of God." To render his meaning more clear, he adduced certain cruel and loathsome practises of the animal world—as,

for example, those of apes, dogs, frogs, the barbarity of the cat to the mouse, the thefts of the eagle from the fish-hawk, the rapture of nests by stronger birds who turn out their original tenants to die of cold and slow starvation, the enslaving of the black ants by the red, and sundry other habits which shock our sense of justice or of decency ; and he ingeniously summed up the effect of these instances of barbarity and licentiousness on his mind by saying that he felt as if, on gaining access to the mansion of a reputedly good man, he had discovered room after room filled with obscene pictures and instruments of torture. When I received this letter I chanced to be reading the *Life of Theodore Parker*, the well-known Boston preacher, and soon came on a passage in which he confessed that for a while, though only for a while, his faith in the goodness of God had been troubled and perplexed by this very difficulty, and, strange to say, adduced the very same set of illustrations from the filthy and cruel instincts and habits of animals, in almost the very same words, though unfortunately he has left no record of the arguments by which he conquered his doubts and beat his music out.

You will not be surprised to hear that this

singular train of accidents, all happening within the compass of a few weeks, made a strong impression on my mind, or that it speedily occurred to me that some of *you* might be fretted with the same perplexity, and that it might be well for me to give you what help I could toward a reasonable solution of it. It is one of those "spectres of the mind" which I myself have had to fight, which, thanks to my faith in the Eternal Wisdom and Love, I *have* fought and laid; and it would make me very happy if I could banish it from even one of your hearts, so that it should no longer haunt you with its suggestions of terror and of doubt.

But do not expect too much—more than any man can give. Remember what you heard from Browning last Sunday—and it would be hard to find a more vigorous and penetrating thinker;—that it is only man, with the *narrow* mind, who expects to "cram inside his finite God's infinitude," and claims "a right to understand what passes understanding." Sir Walter Scott who, despite his genius, possessed that large sanity of common sense which does not always accompany genius, speaking of this very question, writes in one of his letters, that in which he acknowledged the receipt of Byron's

Cain: "The great key to the mystery is, perhaps, *the imperfection of our own faculties*, which see and feel strongly the partial evils which press upon us, but know too little of the general system of the universe to be aware how the existence of these (evils) is to be reconciled with the benevolence of the great Creator." And when a Scott acknowledges the imperfection of human faculties, when a Browning warns us not to claim a right to understand what passes understanding, when Shakespeare himself suggests that there are many things in heaven and earth of which our philosophy has never dreamed or can only dream, no one of us need scruple to confess that we are surrounded by mysteries which, with our inferior and comparatively untrained faculties, we cannot hope to fathom, or to admit that, in dealing with them, it will be our highest wisdom to listen to a higher Wisdom than our own. Let us make the confession frankly and boldly. Why should we be ashamed to make it, we who profess to believe rather than to know, when even those who profess to know rather than to believe have made it just as humbly as we can do? Science, which has done so much to classify and to interpret the facts and laws of the

physical universe, acknowledges her ignorance, or, rather, the limitations of her knowledge ; she confesses that she does not know where matter comes from, or what force is, and that she has traced neither life nor thought to its ultimate source : she confesses, *i.e.*, that she has not solved the main, the fundamental, problems which come within her range, or, at best, has only solved them with a guess. She confesses that the great secrets she has discovered—all those waves and vibrations, for example, which are essential to her theories of light and colour—are imperceptible to sense, that they even seem to contradict all that our senses report to us, and that by the vast majority of men they can only be received by an act of faith, faith in the testimony of a few trained and thoughtful minds.

Why, then, should witlesse man so much misweene,
That nothing is but that which he hath seene ?

Or why should we be ashamed to confess, why should we suspect that we are making a damaging admission in confessing that, behind the simple facts and phenomena of the spiritual world which we seek to classify and interpret that we may reach the laws that govern them,

there lie deep problems which we have not solved, mysteries we cannot fathom ; that, our imperfect faculties being incapable of resolving and demonstrating them, we must be content with working hypotheses ; and that even these hypotheses, these theories and speculations, must be received, in a vast majority of cases, by an act of faith, faith in the testimony of men more gifted or more experienced than ourselves? To this admission we *must* come at last. Why should we wait to be driven to it? Let us begin with it, and make it frankly, without reserve and without shame.

Take this very problem—the reconciliation of all the pain and misery we see around us with the absolute goodness of the Creator of all things—and consider what, consider how much, we need before we can so much as attempt any adequate solution of it, and what chance there is of our being able to solve it with our inferior and unassisted faculties. We need to have before us the whole past history of the universe, the whole cycle of its present conditions, its whole future course, and the end to which it is to run. We need to know whether partial evil may not tend to general good, whether present evil may not be a discipline by which we are

being trained for larger ultimate good. We need—do we need much short of omniscience, of being as God, knowing good and evil, knowing all things even ?

Remember we do not escape the problem by closing the pages of the Bible, but only shut ourselves out from our most likely source of help. The problem stands as conspicuously in the book of Science as in the book of Religion. That “struggle for existence” and that “survival of the fittest” of which Science speaks involves all the cruel and filthy habits of the animal world from which we shrink, and the very bondage to waste, imperfection, and corruption, of which the Bible speaks so tenderly and so hopefully.

Remember, above all, that *this* problem, like so many more runs up, in the last resort, into that great problem of the origin and permission of evil which John Foster compared to a great black wall encompassing our whole world of thought on every side. Many heads have been broken, many brains beaten out, against this wall, without making much impression upon it ; we cannot get through, we cannot *see* through it, even yet : we can only surmount it on the wings of faith. Reduced to such a strait as this, shall

we refuse to use our wings, refuse even to listen to the grave authoritative voices which speak to us from the Bible, and teach us what to believe and why we should believe it?

For myself, the only helpful thought I have ever got on this great mystery has come to me through the Bible, from the suggestions which it makes at once to faith and to reason. And it is this: that moral evil is, at least, an inevitable *risk*, perhaps an inevitable accident, in the creation of such a world as this.¹ If the Maker of heaven and earth was to surround Himself with anything more than mere automata, mere puppets, with no wills of their own, incapable therefore of rendering a voluntary affection, a cheerful and unforced obedience; if He was to surround Himself with beings such as we are, beings, *i.e.*, who had wills of their own that they might freely make them his, beings who could think, and love, and obey,—then this tremendous risk of the incoming of evil must of necessity be hazarded. For “if they were free to think truly, must they not be free to think untruly? if free to love, must they not be free not to love; if

¹ I state the thought as briefly as possible here, as I have already stated it more at length in *The Genesis of Evil*, pp. 1-41.

free to obey, must they not be free to disobey? If my heart is not my own, I cannot give it to you. If my will is not mine, I cannot make it yours." And what is all this but to say that the very creation of beings in themselves good, *i.e.*, capable of a voluntary goodness, involves the risk of their becoming evil?

Nay, more; if God was to surround Himself with myriads on myriads of intelligent creatures free to disobey, in order that they might be free to obey, was it not well-nigh inevitable that, sooner or later, some of them should prove their freedom by disobedience? How else could they assure themselves that they *were* free, that their wills were their own? Living in a world of law and order, in which all creatures but themselves rendered a necessary and involuntary obedience to their Maker and Lord, how were they to certify themselves that they were not bound by this chain of necessity except by snapping it, except by transgressing the bounds of law and order, except by falling into sin?

Holy Scripture affirms that, at the very outset of his career, man did thus assert and prove his freedom. Nay, it affirms a similar and previous catastrophe in the heavenly world, among the spirits who kept not their first estate; but, as in

that larger higher world we can only follow with trembling and uncertain feet, let us confine our thoughts to this world, and to what is known as the Fall of Man. The Scripture record of the Fall is dismissed, and that by some wise and good men, as a mere myth such as may be found in the earliest records of every race. Others, more reverently, regard it as a parable which sets forth the fall of every man that cometh into the world, the triumph of the lower over the higher nature, of animal appetite over the sense of duty and the aspirations of the spirit. But take it as you will, refine and generalize it as you will, no candid student of the Bible will deny that throughout, in the teaching of our Lord and the letters of his Apostles as well as in the earlier Sacred Writings, the moral estate of man, its sinfulness and imperfection, is traced to the sin of the father of us all, and that the deteriorated physical condition of the world we inhabit is declared to be connected with that sin. However we may shrink from it, however disputable or incredible we may think it, the affirmation of the Bible stands plain and clear; it is repeated again and again: it is woven into the very stuff of the New Testament as well as the Old—that by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin.

And now that we stand on the very brink of my text, and of that solution of our problem which it suggests, let us mark how far we have got, and on what we are agreed. We have agreed, I think, that our problem, whether we ask—only, “How is the presence of so much suffering to be reconciled with the absolute goodness and supremacy of God?” or whether we ask, in larger terms, “How is the goodness of God to be reconciled with the existence and permission of evil?” is one of which, with our limited and unassisted faculties, we cannot hope to reach an adequate solution; that, whatever our solution may be, we cannot undertake to *prove* it in the strict sense, but must be content with a working hypothesis such as our reason can approve and rest in; but that this hypothesis, if we are to be content with it, must honestly cover and explain all the facts it professes to cover and explain. We have agreed that it does seem reasonable to assume that, if He who made all things was to surround Himself with free spirits, having wills of their own, who should be capable of loving and serving Him and of sharing his eternal righteousness, and not with mere automata who could only render Him a blind and involuntary obedience,

it was inevitable that they should be free to withhold as well as to give their love, free to disobey as well as to obey ; while it was only too likely that some of them should, at some time, prove their wills their own by departing from his high and perfect will ; inevitable, therefore, if He is as wise and good and kind as we take Him to be, that He should have foreseen the advent of moral evil, and have prepared to overcome it with good, or even compel it to conduce to larger good. And then, feeling our inability to go further, or even to verify the conclusions we had reached, we have agreed to listen to men wiser and better than ourselves, to the Book which, it is admitted, speaks most wisely and with most authority on these high themes ; and we have found that the Bible constantly affirms such a catastrophe as we have assumed, traces the sin and misery of man to the transgression or fall of Adam, and hints that, in the great mercy of God, even this fall has been provided for, and is to be overruled for the larger good of the human race.

If we are agreed so far, the words of St. Paul not only confirm our conclusion at every point, but carry our working hypothesis one point further, and render it more complete. For he

asserts that the moral fall of man had physical consequences or concomitants ; *that by, or for, his sin, the whole creation was reduced, against its will, into that bondage to imperfection and corruption in which we find it ; that in this bondage it labours and groans, longing for deliverance, struggling up toward a freedom and a perfection which it never quite attains ; but that it solaces itself under the miseries of its bondage by cherishing an indomitable hope of rising into the freedom and perfection for which it yearns, when the redemption of man from his bondage shall be complete.*

In this conception of man, and the world, and of a certain intimate correspondence in their fate both in the present and the future, there is an element of poetry no doubt : how large and noble that element is I will try to shew you by and by. But its main outlines of meaning are clear. And in many respects, notably in that of the sympathy between man and his dwelling-place, man and his environment, it is confirmed by Science and Philosophy ; while, in every respect, it is confirmed by many other passages of the New Testament. And, on the whole, though grave objection may be taken to it, I know of no other hypothesis which works so

well, none so reasonable and complete, none so wholesome or so fraught with courage and hope. It covers all the facts, and gives an adequate explanation of them. It reconciles the absolute goodness and supremacy of the Creator with the pain and suffering, the waste and imperfection, of which we find traces so many and so deep in his works. For if moral evil be an inevitable risk in the creation of free and intelligent beings ; if physical evil be at once the punishment and the correction of moral evil ; if it is the creature, not the Creator, who is responsible for all that pains and perplexes us in the solemn drama of human life ; if out of this mingled yarn of good and evil in the strand of our present life God is weaving a fairer larger life for us all ; and if, when we are redeemed into this higher life, the whole creation is to share our freedom and our glory,—then, surely, we have an hypothesis with which we may well be content, with which we may work until that which is perfect is come and we know even as also we are known, and for which, if only we can accept it, we may well bow before the Sovereign Wisdom and Goodness with thankful and obedient hearts.

“ *If only we can accept it ! But can we ?* ”
Well, have you any better, any more reasonable

and adequate and wholesome, hypothesis to suggest? If not, why not accept this as at least a working hypothesis, and work with it until it fails you?

Do you say, "It has failed already; *Evolution* has disproved it." I reply, Evolution has proved nothing in the strict logical sense, and has disproved nothing. For this too is only a generalization, a working hypothesis. Valuable as it is, it is only the method, perhaps only one of the methods, by which the creative Force or Person works, or such an imperfect conception of that method as our limited faculties can frame. Modestly and accurately stated, it may be true, *is* true, as I think, though my opinion on such a subject is of little worth. But I am not prepared to admit that it is the only truth, or even the only method in which He works who built all things. And if any of you imagine that the doctrine of Evolution has disproved the Fall of Man, or has proved that the history of man has been a growth, an ascent from lower to higher forms, unbroken by any fall, I must remind you that the whole evidence of History is against you; that the words "decline and fall" are not peculiar to the Bible; that even the most cultivated races have fallen back into

barbarism, the purest races into impurity, and the most pious races into the darkest superstitions.

Beyond this I will only, for the present, submit for your consideration :

(1) That Evolution is not the last, the final, word or discovery of Science, which is likely to do at least as much in the future as it has done in the past ; that probably it is not the only, or a sufficient, key to all physical problems even, since it makes much too light of the great catastrophes and reversions for which the evidence seems very strong ; and that therefore Science herself will, in all probability, discover some larger and more adequate solution of the mysteries which perplex us than a word, or theory, which does not explain the *origin* of anything, or the catastrophes which break the even and upward flow of life.

(2) That we know too little of what *moral* evolution involves and implies to allow that a catastrophe, a fall, is no part of the process, or that it is impossible for us even by our falls to rise.

(3) That if the scientific doctrine of Evolution *should* prove to turn against the Fall, the scientific doctrine of Heredity is all in favour of it.

And (4) that the very idea of Evolution does, after all, suggest such an advance from bondage to freedom, from less to more perfect forms of life, as St. Paul here plainly affirms.

Weigh these objections fairly, let your reason have free play as you compare the Christian solution of this vast problem with any other solution which the intellect and imagination of man have proposed, and I have no doubt which you will ultimately pronounce to be the more reasonable, adequate, and helpful. I believe you will be constrained to accept the large hope and lofty hypothesis which St. Paul offers you ; and that as you contemplate the full broad stream of human life, vexed with so many currents, darkened by so many shadows, played upon by so many winds, with both source and end hidden from your view, you will say with one of our most recent poets, and say with a firmer tone than his :—

*Out of the mist the river glides to us,
Glides like a phantom strange and marvellous
Out of the mist.*

*Into the mist the river passes on,
With inarticulate murmur flows anon
Into the mist.*

And yet, perchance, upon its infant rills
Fair shone the sun amid the cradling hills
Before the mist.

And when at last the full flood nears the main,
Perchance a glory crowns it yet again,
Beyond the mist.





III.

THE GROANS OF NATURE.

"For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." — ROMANS viii. 19-22.



GAVE you the general sense of this passage in my last discourse while endeavouring to shew you how, on St. Paul's hypothesis, all the pain and suffering that are in the world may be reconciled with the absolute goodness

and supremacy of God, and to confirm you in the conclusion which Browning has so tersely and finely expressed :

God is all-wise, all-powerful, all-good :
All-wise, and *knoweth* therefore what is best ;
All-good, and *willeth* therefore what is best ;
All-powerful—*can do* therefore what is best :
And if he *can*, why, *must*.

Hence we may now pass by that great theme, and give ourselves wholly to the pleasant task of studying St. Paul's words, and verifying them in so far as we can.

However cursorily we may glance at these words, we can hardly fail to gather from them, (1) that St. Paul affirms the whole natural world to be in a grievous bondage, a bondage to vanity and corruption, a bondage which it resents, against which it struggles, over which it groans ; and (2) that Nature solaces herself under the unutterable miseries of her bondage by cherishing a steadfast and ardent hope of being delivered from bondage into freedom, from imperfection into perfection, when man, her lord and crown, shall be redeemed, set free, made perfect. Let us examine this double affirmation ; let us ask how far it is verified by what we know of the world around us, and mark how noble and

statuesque is the form in which the Apostle has embodied it.

I. *Of the bondage of Nature* St. Paul affirms, (1) that it is a bondage to vanity and corruption; and (2) that it is an unwilling bondage, a bondage against which it wrestles and groans.

(1) What does he mean by a bondage to "vanity"? He means much more, and a much more terrible doom, than we commonly suspect. For to be in bondage to *vanity* is, in the Scriptural sense, to have been *made in vain*. It means not to have touched one's ideal, not to have answered one's chief end. It means to search and never find, to pursue and not attain, to strive and not to conquer, to live a life of baffled endeavour and defeated hopes. It means waste, impotence, failure. And whether for a creature, or for a creation, there can be no more sinister and damnatory doom than this.

What does he mean by a bondage to corruption? He means a life made subject to death, to putrescence, to blight, disease, disaster, to all the ministries and influences which deform devour, destroy.

And as we should not expect to find marks of imperfection and failure on all the works of a *perfect* God, so neither should we expect to find

the sentence and doom of death on all the works of the *living* God.

Yet to this sinister and terrible bondage, this unnatural bondage to vanity and corruption, St. Paul affirms that the whole fair free realm of Nature has been reduced. Is there, then, anything in the world around us which confirms his affirmation? There is everything, everything. The very Science which finds a divine œconomy in Nature, also finds the most prodigal waste : a single fish, for example, may spawn a myriad or a million eggs, and only one—not always one—shall be spared to carry on the race ; or a thousand seeds may be scattered by the breeze, yet only one—not always one—shall alight on suitable soil, and successfully resist the manifold adverse influences to which it is exposed. The very Science which finds so much in Nature to admire, also finds marks of imperfection on even her fairest productions : hardly a single flower or tree in a thousand, for instance, has its full vigour happily and harmoniously developed, or is allowed to become all that it might be ; and even this one may soon be surpassed in that struggle for existence in which only the fittest survive. In a world in which there is so much that is fair and lovely and precious, it seems a kind of base-

ness, a kind of profanity, to say—and yet, if we are to tell the truth and reach the truth, it must be said—that nothing is quite perfect, quite up to the ideal in the Creator's mind, or even quite up to the idea of it which we ourselves can frame. All the good creatures of God have to contend, for their lives, with some unfavourable conditions, and shew some blemish or defect arising from that struggle. Most of them, if not all, fall below the standard of excellence which we may gather from the study and comparison of others of their own species ; and even in the most excellent the expert is able to discover latent possibilities of perfection which it has not yet developed. The fairest flower may be induced to take deeper colours and a sweeter fragrance. The finest fruit may be persuaded to put on a more exquisite bloom, an ampler round, a richer flavour. The swiftest horse may breed a more perfect form and a fleeter pace. Nothing comes up to its highest conceivable mark, or reaches its purest ideal.

And all things die, even the fairest and the best. The best and fairest often die first, and have the briefest span. Death is the universal doom, not to be evaded, not to be deferred. All things are in bondage to corruption ; all perish and pass away.

Here, then, is our problem, and St. Paul's. How comes it to pass that in a world made by the perfect God all things bear some mark of imperfection ; that in a world made and ruled by the living God all things die ?

(2) St. Paul's answer to the question is suggested by the words, "*Not by its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it ;*" and, again, "*The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*" The creatures were not *made* for this bondage, or they would not strive and groan under it. The living perfect God did not intend this bondage when He made them ; or, at least, this is not the end for which they are and were created. They have been *forced* into it, but not by Him ; and they submit to it with an unutterable reluctance, an intolerable shame.

St. Paul's solution of the problem is based on his general theory of the origin and function of evil. And this theory, briefly put, runs thus, as we saw last Sunday :—If the Maker of all things was to surround Himself with free and intelligent spirits, having wills of their own that they might make them his, they must be free to disobey as well as to obey. The very creation of beings such as we are involved, therefore, the *risk* of disobedience, of sin, of such a departure

from his will as would throw us out of harmony with Him, with his purposes, and with all the creatures who kept the law which we had broken. Such an assertion of self-will took place early in the human story, as it had also previously taken place in the story of those fallen spirits who had not kept their first estate. The advent of moral evil had physical consequences. All things had been placed under man's feet, "all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea ;" and they all shared in the effects of *his* fall to whom God had given dominion over the works of his hands. Physical evils were intended by God to be at once a punishment, and the correction, of moral evil ; all the hardships and pains it brought into the world were designed to drive man back, in penitence and trust, to the God from whom he had strayed, to the obedience, and, through the obedience, to the dominion, he had lost.

This is St. Paul's theory ; and it is at least a large and coherent theory—of the origin and function of evil : so that when we ask *him*, " How is all the pain and suffering of the world, its agony and groans, to be reconciled with the

absolute goodness and supremacy of God?" he virtually replies, "You are attributing to God the results of your own weakness and sinfulness; it is you, not He, who are responsible for the pain and suffering around and within you." And here, in these words, the Apostle takes up so much of his general theory as he requires for his immediate purpose, and affirms that Nature's bondage to imperfection and corruption is not a willing one, that it has been imposed on it, against its will, by man. When man rebelled against God, nature rebelled against *him*.

This, at least, is how St. Paul explained, how any pious Hebrew was bound to explain, the bondage of Nature to vanity and corruption. No doubt it has an element of poetry in it, and poetry of a very high and noble kind. But if poetry be, as Wordsworth defined it, "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," to say that an hypothesis is poetical is to allege nothing against it; it is, rather, to raise a presumption in its favour: for on these large questions which it takes *the whole man* to answer, rather than a man abnormally cultivated in a part of himself, who would not rather accept the answer of a poet, if at least he is a true poet and capable of

giving us the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, than even that of a man of science, indisputable authority as *he* is within his own domain? Sir Isaac Newton was a man of science and made great discoveries ; but his interpretations of Hebrew prophecy were not worth the paper they were written on. Charles Darwin was a man of science, and made perhaps the greatest discoveries of our age ; but his verdicts on Beethoven and Shakespeare would not rank very high, had he been rash enough to pronounce them : how should they when he confessed that music had no charm for him, and that, after he had addicted himself to scientific research, he found even Shakespeare's plays tedious and unreadable? Professor Tyndall is, if not an eminent man of science, an accomplished and charming expositor of its discoveries ; but his political irritations and vaticinations do not commend themselves to the common sense of his fellow citizens. If we must choose between them—and much of the current talk almost compels such a choice—on the large questions of morality and religion the poet, the man who fuses reason, heart, imagination in a single act, is by far the higher authority of the two, as indeed the ablest men of science that I have met have been forward to confess. Lest

the thought should be new to any of you, and should seem to need some authority behind it, let me remind you of a saying of that luminous and impartial thinker, Emerson, viz.: "The highest species of reason upon divine subjects is rather *the fruit of a sort of moral imagination* than of the reasoning machines, such as Locke and Clarke and David Hume."

And yet St. Paul's hypothesis, poetical as it is and the fruit of a profound moral imagination stirred to its very depths, covers at least some facts which science and experience confirm. He implies, for instance, that the subjection of Nature to imperfection and corruption is an unwilling one; that the creatures around and beneath us, despite their bondage, are more loyal to their Maker and themselves than we are. And who that has "breathed thoughtful breath" has not felt, while walking through some fair natural scene, its purity a rebuke to his own impurity, its loveliness a rebuke to his own uncomeliness, its obedience to law a rebuke to his own disobedience, its tranquility a rebuke to his own turbulence and unrest? The rebuke which Nature holds for the pride, the greed, the baseness, the quarrelsomeness, the sordid worldliness of Man, is a standing common-place in all

literature, and especially in the poetry of every race.

St. Paul implies that the whole creation, the whole round of Nature, suffered when man fell, and was reduced to a hateful bondage. And does not Science, while emphasizing the influence of his environment on Man, also affirm the influence of Man on his environment, and assume that between him and his dwelling-place there must be a certain sympathy and correspondence? If you want to know how, and how foully, man may degrade and enslave the natural world, you have only to go wherever men most congregate, to any large city and its environs—above all, to the squalid suburbs where the builder is still at work—and to mark how the fair face of Nature is every way defaced, the light of her eye clouded over, and all the sweet influences by which she ministers to health, and to the heart, are arrested, or even empoisoned. You have only to travel through any district, once more than common fair—Staffordshire, for example—to see how man has given her ashes for beauty, and a grimy squalor for the garments of praise and joy. You have only to listen to the eloquent jeremiads in which Mr. Ruskin denounces the pollutions man has

wrought, and laments over the irrecoverable loveliness of a departed world.¹

¹ In the Preface to his *Westminster Sermons* Charles Kingsley quotes a passage from "that veteran botanist, the venerable Elias Fries of Lund," which contains a capital illustration in point:—"A broad band of waste land follows gradually in the steps of cultivation. . . . But it is not impossible, only difficult, for man, without renouncing the advantage of culture itself, one day to make reparation for the injury which he has inflicted; he is appointed lord of creation. True it is that thorns and thistles, ill-favoured and poisonous plants, well named by botanists rubbish plants, mark the track which man has proudly traversed through the earth. Before him lay original nature in her wild but sublime beauty. Behind him he leaves a desert, a deformed and ruined land; for childish desire of destruction or thoughtless squandering of vegetable treasures, has destroyed the character of nature; and, terrified, man himself flies from the arena of his actions, leaving the impoverished earth to barbarous races or to animals, so long as yet another spot in virgin beauty smiles before him. Here, again, in selfish pursuit of profit, and consciously or unconsciously following the abominable principle which one man expressed—'Après nous le Déluge'—he begins anew the work of destruction. Thus did cultivation, driven out, leave the East, and perhaps the deserts long ago robbed of their coverings: like the wild hordes of old over beautiful Greece, thus rolls this conquest with fearful rapidity from East to West through America; and the planter now often leaves the already exhausted land, and the Eastern climate, become infertile through the demolition of the forests, to introduce a similar revolution into the Far West."

"Man's work," says Kingsley himself, "is too often the curse of the very planet which he misuses."

St. Paul implies that Nature groans in a perpetual travail to escape from its bondage to vanity and corruption, to rise into fairer and more enduring forms of life. And what is the scientific doctrine of Evolution, which Emerson sums up in the pregnant couplet,

Striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form—

what is all this but an ample confirmation of all that the Apostle's words imply and suggest?

There is much, then, in the little we know of the world around us, which verifies the Apostle's affirmation, that Nature is in bondage, and that this bondage has been imposed upon it, not with its goodwill, but by reason of him who subjected it.

II. Can we say as much of *the Hope* which, according to St. Paul, it cherishes, and with which it solaces itself under its long agony and travail? According to him, it not only struggles against imperfection and decay, it carries to this struggle an urgent and ardent longing, an "earnest expectation," a sure and certain hope of deliverance. It *is* to be free, it *is* to be perfect, or so it persuades itself, on the day on which man shall be redeemed from *his* bondage,

when the child of God in him is set free and made perfect. And you know how much there is in the Bible to confirm this hope, to assure us that, as Nature has shared in all the bitter consequences of man's fall, so also it is to share in all the blessedness and glory of his recovery, of his redemption. It is not Paul alone who avows this hope, though possibly he may stand alone in attributing it to the inanimate or irrational creation. Our Lord Himself speaks of the time when those He came to save—and He came to draw all men unto Himself—shall be raised to the throne of dominion which man has lost, as "the Regeneration," and has thus implied the coming of a time when all things shall be made new, when a regenerated race shall rule over a renovated world. And St. John is very bold, and sets before us the vision of a new heaven and a new earth issuing from the bosom of the old ; yes, and even of a new *city* which shall not darken and degrade its site, but in which all things shall be fair and precious, though "nations" throng its streets ; a city through which there shall flow streams of living water under the widespreading branches of trees which yield their fruit every month, and in which there shall be no more darkness, no more death,

no dividing sea, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more.

We cannot of course turn to Science, or Experience, to *prove* that this vision of a golden age to come is true. For *evidence* we must rely on faith; though, in passing, let me say that the appeal to faith, at least when hypotheses are in question, is obviously reasonable; for, as George Eliot has well pointed out: "Even strictly measuring science" could never have grown to what it is "without that forecasting ardour which feels the agitations of discovery beforehand, and has a *faith* in its own preconception that surmounts many failures of experience." But though we cannot get proofs, we may get hints which will yield some confirmation to minds imbued with "that forecasting ardour" to which all great discoveries are due. For, surely, Nature behaves *as if* she cherished such a hope as that which St. Paul ascribes to her. Is she not for ever rising, on stepping-stones of dead and abandoned forms of life, to higher and nobler forms? As you watch and consider her ways, does she not *seem* to be struggling against hindering impediments, striving for a freer hand, aiming at a more perfect and enduring beauty, just as if she could be content with nothing short of an absolute liberty and perfection?

What do our poets, who utter "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," say? What do our own two great poets, Tennyson and Browning, say,—both of them being, remember, men distinguished by their power of thought, and both in harmony with the scientific spirit of the age, many of whose discoveries they have set to an immortal music? In familiar words Tennyson prays that science may grow from more to more, that man may grow in self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, that so, decade by decade, and century by century, we may draw nearer to

That one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

What that event is he implies when he speaks of man and woman, after ages of rich and varied discipline and experience, sitting at last upon the skirts of Time, "full-summed in all their powers," and predicts,

Then comes the statelier Eden back to man,
Then springs the crowning race of human kind.

So *he* expresses his belief in the Christian forecast of a redeemed and regenerate race dwelling in a renovated world. And what says Brown-

ing? Browning says that even now already there arise in man

August anticipations, symbols, types,
Of a dim splendour ever on before
In that eternal circle run by life;

and predicts that when this circle rounds upon itself, and that splendour is seen in all its glory, it will satisfy even our "unmeasured thirst for good." He says that in every aspiring soul there must be at times a sense of sadness and vacancy and failure, in which this bright vision is clouded over, but that even this sad sense of failure breeds a new movement of advance, a new impatience of narrow conditions and present imperfection, and deepens the desire for a more perfect good, compelling men to stretch out hands of prayer and trust, and to cry :

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable
Name?

Builder and maker Thou of houses not made with
hands !

What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the
same?

Doubt that Thy power can *fill* the heart that Thy
power expands?

There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall be
as before ;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound :

What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more :

On the earth, the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect round.

And so he, too, is looking for a better race in a bettered world, a regenerated race in a renovated world.

All this is poetry, no doubt, and is to be taken in the spirit rather than in the letter : but have we not seen that, on such questions as that now before us, the poet of all men speaks with the highest authority ? And, to say nothing of his inspiration, St. Paul was at least as great a poet, and as great a philosopher, as any I have quoted, though for the most part he confined himself to prose.¹

III. What, indeed, can be more nobly poetical than the passage before us ? St. Paul here personifies the whole creation, attributing to it conscious intelligence and an indomitable will, and personifies it as indignantly protesting against the transaction by which it was enslaved to vanity and corruption, as refusing to submit to it, as striving and audibly groaning in its bondage, as

¹ Not always, however, for St. Paul was a prophet ; and all the prophets, Christian as well as Hebrew, rose easily, on spur of occasion, into the use of poetic forms of speech.

seeking to break the fetters by which it is shackled. The more closely we look into his words, the more instinct they become with fine poetic spirit and suggestion. Take, for example, only a single verse, the first verse, of my text, which runs thus in our Version: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." The Greek word for expectation (*ἀποκαραδοκία*) is compounded of three words, which mean (*κῆρα*) *the head*, (*δοκέω*) *to wait for*, or *espy*, and (*ἀπο*) *from*, or *from afar*: so that what this one word conveys is, that the enslaved Creation waits with uplifted head, its eye fixed on the far-off point from which deliverance is to come. The verb (*ἀπεδέχεται*) translated "waiteth" or "longeth for" is another of these admirable and suggestive compounds, and is made up of three words which mean (*δέχομαι*) *to receive*, (*ἐκ*) *out of the hands of*, and (*ἀπο*), again, *from afar*: so that the full force of the verb, in its connexion, is, that the whole creation stands stretching forth its hands to receive the far-off deliverance for which it waits and yearns. Put the two verbs and their implications together, and they come to this: that *Nature, an unwilling slave to vanity and corruption, stands, impatient of her bonds, with uplifted*

head, scanning with longing eye the distant point of the horizon from which she looks for help, her hands stretched out to grasp and welcome the redemption into freedom and perfection which she yearns for and confidently expects. Can anything be more noble, more severely noble, more statuesque? As Godet has said, a sculptor of any imagination and genius might carve a statue of Hope from it.

But, finally, is the conception as true as it is beautiful? Well, you have seen how much there is to verify and confirm it in our own experience, in the discoveries of science, and in the teaching of poets who give us "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." It may have to be modified in this detail or that, for we must not press poetry too prosaically. Possibly St. Paul himself, were he alive now, and as much master of the knowledge of this day as he was of that of his own, might cast it in a somewhat different form. The luminous and penetrating intellect of Emerson, for example, has put it in a very different, yet sufficient, form, in that tract on *Nature*, which has been called "the most intense and quintessential of his writings," a tractate written at a time in which he had no prejudice in favour of the Biblical writers. Lest I should

be suspected of any bias, let me lay before you the *resumé* of his argument given in the last Life of him, that by Dr. Garnett.[†] By its ruling conception "of external Nature as an incarnation of the Divine Mind, it utterly abolished most of the controversies which had agitated the intellect of America, and in particular caught up the philosophy of Jonathan Edwards, that masterpiece of earthy reasoning, into a heaven of which Edwards had never dreamed. The rigid despotism of an extra-mundane ruler now appeared the free agency of an indwelling power : and similarly, without infringing a single moral rule, the stiff morality of the Unitarians was transfigured and glorified until it hardly knew itself. At the same time God and Nature were by no means confounded ; the former was recognized as the infinite cause, the latter as the infinite effect : and though a cause without an effect is certainly inconceivable, the formal duality is made not less clear than the substantial unity. Man was represented as the intermediate phase of being, tending upwards or downwards, according as he

[†] Perhaps I may be permitted to add that you would all do well to spend a couple of shillings on this book, since it is one of the ablest additions to English literature of its kind that has appeared for many a year.

inclines to Divine freedom or natural necessity. To quote Mr. Cabot's analysis, '*regarded as part of nature, he is the victim of his environment : of race, temperament, sex, climate, organization. But man is not simply a part of nature, not mere effect, but, potentially, shares the cause. When he submits his will to the Divine inspiration, he becomes a creator in the finite. If he is disobedient, if he would be something in himself, he finds all things hostile and incomprehensible. As a man is, so he sees, and so he does. When we persist in disobedience, the inward ruin is reflected in the world around us. When we yield to the remedial force of spirit, then evil is no more seen.*' Evil, then, may be regarded as the price man pays for being above Nature ; and, as Emerson would not deem this as by any means too high, he was necessarily an optimist to the extent, at least, of maintaining that, much as we suffer from moral evil, we should be worse off without it. *Without it, we should be but a part of the machinery of Nature ; its existence is a proof of our liberty*, which involves the liberty to rise superior to it. . . . 'Nature stretcheth out her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness. Willingly does she follow his steps with the rose and the violet, and bend her lines of grandeur and grace to the

decoration of her darling child. Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. *A virtuous man is in unison with her works, and makes the central figure of the visible sphere.*' Man, then, had but to place himself in a right relation with God and Nature, and the inextricable puzzles of liberty and necessity would be solved of themselves. If the logical connection of the treatise was not always very close, it is to be remembered that *it was the work of a poet, and that the ideas it embodied were for the most part so exquisite and ennobling as to be their own best credentials.*"¹

I have quoted this passage, long as it is, in part because it throws, especially in the sentences I have italicized, light on many passages both in this and the previous discourse, and will help us in the discourse which will follow this; but mainly, because it shews how the hypothesis of St. Paul may be modified by modern thought, while yet, in substance, it remains the same. Neither of the three writers cited in it—neither Dr. Garnett, Cabot, nor Emerson himself—seem to have had these great verses of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans in their mind, and yet in

¹ *Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, by Richard Garnett, LL.D. (London : Walter Scott.)

how many ways Emerson's words recall them, and are illustrated by them. Whether we say, with the Apostle, "Nature has been made subject to imperfection and corruption, not of her own will, but by reason of him who subjected it," or, with Emerson, "When man is disobedient, when he would be something in himself (and apart from God), he finds all things hostile and incomprehensible, when he persists in disobedience, the inward ruin is reflected in the world around him;" whether we say, with the former, "Nature cherishes the hope of man's redemption from evil in her heart, waits, yearns, groans for it, because, when he is manifested as the son of God, Nature herself also shall share his freedom and perfection," or, whether we say, with the latter, "When we yield to the remedial force of spirit (of the Divine Spirit acting on the spirit of man), then evil is no more seen, or is seen to be only the price we had to pay for being above Nature, for being free from the iron chains of necessity, for being free to rise superior to her, who now willingly bends her lines of grandeur and of grace to decorate her darling child, while he finds himself in unison with all her works, and stands forth the central and dominant figure of the visible sphere," is not of supreme importance. The difference between

the two is one of terminology, rather than of the thoughts which underlie the terms. Our conception of Man, and of his present and future relation to the Creator and the Creation, is virtually the same. So that while we may fairly prefer St. Paul's statement to that of any modern thinker, we may also affirm that, in substance and in spirit, even a modern thinker admits it to be as true to-day as on the day it was written.

And, assuredly, if we are to choose—and this seems to be the only alternative—between the materialistic hypothesis, which foresees an evolution into ever finer qualities and fairer forms of life, only to arrest and overwhelm it in a catastrophe in which all life is to be destroyed : if, I say, we are to choose between this and the Christian or spiritual hypothesis, which forecasts a similar evolution into ever finer and more perfect forms of life, but affirms that, let what will happen to this world, that evolution will still be carried on, on a higher plane, with a more absolute freedom, toward a loftier perfection, I cannot doubt that you will choose the nobler hypothesis, and embrace the hope which alone can give you courage under all the changes of time, and which opens up a bright prospect, full of glory, full of joy, before you, and before humanity at large, when time shall be no more.



IV.

THE GROANS OF HUMANITY.

"And not only so, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body."—
ROMANS viii. 23.



IF, as Browning suggests, it is an obvious and monstrous impertinence for "man, with the narrow mind," to claim that he should "cram inside his finite God's infinitude," and understand that which passes understanding, it is an impertinence of which he is often guilty, and the more often the more narrow and less informed his mind. One perpetually meets with men,

especially young men, who assume that, as often as they demand it, God is bound to compress the whole universe into a nutshell, and place a microscope in their other hand, that they may study it at their convenience and leisure, and even without any sustained effort to understand what it all means. Nay, I myself have met with men, especially young men, who have declared that if, by attending a single discourse, or an hour's conversation with a spiritual guide, the whole secret of the universe could not be explained and brought within the reach of their not very profound intellectual capacity, they absolutely could not believe in God at all; and have declared it in a tone which implied how much *He* would lose by the withdrawal of their patronage and support! Strangely enough, they never take this tone when any lesser kind of knowledge is in question. They do not expect to penetrate all the mysteries and master all the secrets of Music, for example, or of Mathematics, or indeed of any branch of Science or Art, by listening to a single lecture, or by the cursory attention they can devote to it in their spare moments. For this, they admit, only the patient study and practice of many laborious years will suffice, if even that, accompanied by

rare gifts, will suffice. When a man offers (as a man has offered) to teach me Hebrew in six lessons, I know what to think of him. If a mathematician were to promise to make you master of the differential calculus in a week, you would know what to think of him. It is only when the sum and crown of all human knowledge is concerned that men expect a complete and immediate demonstration, and assume that, could it be given, they are able at once to grasp it !

But if the claim of man, with the narrow mind, to compass and comprehend the mystery of the universe is an obvious, and even a ludicrous, impertinence, what shall we say of man, with the guilty conscience, when he assumes that none but a perfect world is good enough for him ; and declares that, unless it is proved to be perfect, he is not going to believe in the goodness of its Creator,—never suspecting that it may be something less than perfect to match his imperfection ! For the present let us say nothing of him. Let us, rather, ask him to consider the weighty words of Schopenhauer, the reigning pessimistic philosopher of the day both in Germany and in England. No one will suspect *him* of any leaning toward Christian dogmas,

and what he has to say is this: "Do we desire to know what men, morally considered, are worth as a whole and in general? We have only to consider their fate as a whole and in general *viz.*, want, wretchedness, affliction, misery, and death. *Eternal justice reigns.* If men were not, as a whole, worthless, their fate would not be so sad. In this sense we may say *the world itself is the judgment of the world.* If we could lay all the misery of the world in one scale, and all the guilt of the world in another, the needle would certainly point to the centre."

If, then, any of you find Religion growing incredible to you because, as you impatiently think, it explains nothing, and proves nothing, and, above all, because it does not enable you, at a stroke, to reconcile all the wrong, pain, and suffering of the world with the absolute goodness of God; if, Religion failing, or seeming to fail you, you are tempted to turn to the last and prevalent forms of modern thought for instruction and comfort, does Schopenhauer offer you much comfort, or much help to live a manly and righteous life? You complain of wrong, of injustice; and the popular philosophy replies, "Eternal justice reigns, even though there be no Eternal One to execute it." You complain that

you are wretched, and it calmly replies, "You are wretched because you are worthless." You passionately demand some explanation, some vindication, of the misery of which the world is full ; and it replies, "The misery of the world is the natural result, the exact equivalent, of the guilt of the world." Do you gain much, even intellectually, by the change? Not much, I think ; while your loss, the loss of hope, is as unquestionable as it is vast—so vast and so unquestionable that some of Schopenhauer's leading disciples have gravely proposed an act of universal suicide as the best solution of the problem of life, as the only way of putting an end to the misery of the world—so *cutting* the knot which they cannot untie.

The principle which underlies Schopenhauer's gloomy and hopeless sentence is, however, common to him and to St. Paul, although they make such different uses of it and conduct it to such different conclusions. They both affirm that *the world is what men have made it*, that their conditions correspond to their moral character and desert. And is there not much in your own knowledge and experience which confirms this principle? As you go from man to man, house to house, town to town, do not their

several physical conditions give you shrewd hints of their moral character and habits? As you pass from province to province, canton to canton, country to country, are you not still able in some good measure to infer the ethical characteristics of their inhabitants from the physical conditions by which they have surrounded themselves, by that imprint of themselves which they have left on street and field? It is but an extension of this principle, although a large extension, when St. Paul affirms that the *world* in which they live is very much what men have made it; that it is subject to vanity and corruption, not by its own good-will, nor by the design and intention of God, but by reason of its subjector, Man: that, in the words of the modern philosopher, *the world itself is the judgment of the world*, that the outward conditions of men correspond to their inward character and desert.

But St. Paul has an immense advantage over the modern pessimist and materialist, in that he both applies his principle more rigidly and consistently, and conducts it to a nobler issue. According to him, the world not only reflects the character of man, but always has reflected it and always will reflect it, saddening in his sorrows and enhancing by sharing his joys.

According to him, the whole creation, in the state of man's innocency, freely obeyed man's will, yielding him an unforced loyalty and service. And as it revolted from him when he revolted from God, became sterile and stubborn and had to be subdued before it would consent to serve him, so also when he shall be redeemed, renewed, set free, made perfect, the creation also shall be delivered from its bondage into liberty and perfection. According to him, the problem of life is to be solved, not by an act of universal suicide, but by a universal redemption, which is to extend, through man, to the world of which he is the lord and crown. According to him, eternal *mercy* reigns, as well as eternal justice; and the world is full of wrong and pain and misery, not simply that man may be judged and punished for his guilt, but that he may be corrected and purged from it, trained to virtue and holiness, led through imperfection to perfection, through death to life everlasting.

Compare these two views, that of the philosopher of the hour and that of the Christian Apostle, and judge for yourselves which is the larger and nobler of the two, which holds the stronger incentives to courage, patience, hope, and a faithful discharge of present duty.

St. Paul has reached this point in his argument when we rejoin him in my text. He has argued that, though the whole creation has been unwillingly made subject to waste and corruption, it nevertheless cherishes a stedfast and ardent hope of being redeemed from bondage into freedom, from death into life. Toward this great hope it is for ever toiling and striving, even unto groaning—lifting up its head to look for it, fixing its eye on the distant point from which it expects it to come, and stretching forth its shackled hands to welcome and embrace it. And, now, he blends the groans of Humanity with the groans of Nature. Man shares in the bondage, in the toil and conflict, in the yearning but sustaining hope, of the natural world. *He* also is looking for redemption, and longing for its advent. As how should he not when, by the body at least, and by all in him that holds of the body, he is a “part of nature,” in the closest alliance and sympathy with it?

Is, then, the subjection of the human race to imperfection and corruption, like that of Nature, an unwilling one—unwilling even on the part of those whom St. Paul would have classed as *natural* men? do even *they* cherish a yearning and a hope for deliverance? Let the universal

revolt from death reply ; and the revolt of all that is highest and best in them against the base lusts, and animal instincts, and sordid transitory aims, by which they are nevertheless enslaved ; and the new social and political changes and reformations by which they are ever seeking to rise to a higher estate, with sweeter manners, purer laws ; and the strong craving, the tenacious hope of immortality which they cherish even where life and immortality have not been brought to light by Christ.

It is not, however, the participation of the *natural* man in the travail, the toil and agony of the natural world of which St. Paul here speaks with an accent of grave astonishment. What does astonish him is that the *spiritual* man, that "*even we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit*" should still "*groan within ourselves*," that even the redeemed should still be "waiting for redemption"—*waiting*, for so the word again implies, as with uplifted head, yearning onward-looking eyes, and outstretched beckoning hands.

Yet the paradox is no contradiction. The redeemed, in so far as they have been redeemed from the thralldom of the flesh, are indeed new creatures, and belong to the new creation which

God is slowly evolving from the bosom of the old. But as yet their redemption is incomplete ; it does not reach to, though it is to cover, their whole physical and psychical nature. By the body, with its appetites, passions, necessities, they are still bound to the old creation, and come under all its sorrowful limitations. Of the heaven heavenly, they are also of the earth earthy. And hence in their flesh, and in their spirit so far as the flesh reacts upon and controls the spirit, they are in bondage to imperfection and corruption. They do not reach, or do not fully reach, the lofty aims they have set before them ; they do not rise into their ideal and realize it ; they fall short of their proper perfection and blessedness.

What advantage have they, then ? Much every way. In them, for example, the dumb groanings and yearnings of Nature and of the natural man become vocal, articulate, prayerful, intercessory. *They* know what is amiss with them, and who can set it right ; what it is they are groaning for, and who can give it them. They know that their redemption has been begun, and begun by One who finishes what He begins. And hence they are sure that the redemption for which they wait, and strive, and

yearn, will come, that their mortal *must* put on immortality, and their corruption incorruption.

For, as St. Paul reminds us, they have "*the firstfruits of the Spirit.*" And by "the firstfruits of the Spirit" I do not take him to mean simply that the good Spirit of God has begun to make them good, to make them anew, to recreate them in the image of Him who created them, or that He has quickened and released within them certain virtues and graces in which there lie the promise and the potency of an entire redemption. He does mean all this, no doubt ; but I understand him to mean also something much more definite than this. For even the man Christ Jesus could not reach his proper perfection and glory until He had risen from the dead and gone up on high. And it was "by the Spirit" that God raised Him from the dead—giving us in *his* resurrection the sample and the pledge of *our* resurrection into life. "But every one in his own order ; *Christ the firstfruits*, afterwards they that are Christ's." As with the Son, so with the sons, of God. They cannot attain perfection, their redemption will not be complete, their glory revealed, while they wear flesh about them, till they exchange the natural for the spiritual body. And in *his* resurrection into that spiritual

and perfect estate they have the proof, and the guarantee, of their resurrection. As surely as He rose, they will rise, that where He is there they may be also. They are not left, like the natural man, to conjectures and peradventures, to yearnings and hopes. In Christ they have the proof that they *shall* rise and be with Him. Just as the firstfruits announced the harvest which stood in the fields, waiting only to be gathered in, so the redemption of Christ, in body as well as in spirit, from all the limits of imperfection and all the taints of corruption, announces *their* redemption. Till that day dawn, and that happy change come, they cannot but groan and yearn for it ; nevertheless, they know that it will come, and that corruption itself will redeem them from their bondage to vanity.

Nor has Science, properly understood, a word to say against the resurrection of Christ, or that of those who share his spirit. For the science which admits that dead matter was at some remote epoch quickened into life by a Power of which it can give no account, can hardly pronounce it a thing impossible, or even improbable, that that same mysterious Power, should quicken it anew. It cannot be incredible that the Power which called life into being at first should be able to raise the dead.

“Even we ourselves,” then, “although we have the firstfruits of the Spirit,” both in the present work of that Spirit on our hearts, and in Christ’s ascent into the heaven from which He sheds down the gifts and influences of that Spirit, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves,” awaiting and yearning for “*the adoption, i.e., the redemption of the body.*” What St. Paul means by “the redemption of the body” we know. He means our final emancipation from all that is earthly and sensual in us. But what does he mean by “the adoption” (*νιοθεσίαν*), or by setting forth the redemption of the body under the figure of an adoption? ¹ Evidently he does not use the word without intention. It comes into its place naturally and logically, from the construction of the sentence, from the flow of thought. He had been speaking of the “revelation” or “manifestation” of “the *sons* of God,” of the deliverance of “the *children* of God.” And now he speaks of the same moment and act as “the *adoption*,” or “the *son-making*,” or, rather, “the *son-announcing*,” the “son-acknowledging.” What is the allusion here?

¹ The *νιοθεσία*, which is *not* adoption *νιοποίησις*, but the mere putting on the *toga virilis* (Kingsley, *Life and Letters*, vol. ii. p. 8).

In all probability the allusion is to a Roman custom with which the readers of the *Epistle to the Romans* would be familiar. It was quite common for a Roman citizen, if he were childless, to adopt a son; and not infrequently he selected a well-born or an accomplished slave who had assisted him in his studies or had managed his household affairs. The legal process of adoption was complicated and tedious. First, the lad, or man, was taken before the civil magistrate, and released from the bonds and disabilities of his servile condition by a formal instrument. Then, for a period, he had to enter on a state of probation, during which, without a son's rights or claims, he had to discharge the duties of a son and occupy a son's place. If he shewed a filial temper and stood his probation well, he was once more taken before the magistrate, where he was formally arrayed in the *toga virilis*, the robe of free Roman manhood, declared to be the son of his former master, and instated in all the rights, immunities, and privileges both of citizenship and sonship. This final ceremony was called "the adoption." And it is to this ceremonial act that the Apostle seems to refer when describing the future glory of the redeemed. Once in bondage to vanity and cor-

ruption, they have, even now already, been raised from their abject condition. They are no longer slaves. They are being proved and trained. Renewed in their minds, they have received that spirit of sonship, that power to become sons, which is the earnest of their future inheritance. But, as yet, the inheritance is not theirs; they have not been publicly adopted; they have not been manifested and declared to be the sons of God with power. Some remnants of their past servile condition and habits still cling to them, some danger of falling away from, of proving unfit for, the grace designed them. Hence they groan and strive, waiting and yearning for "the adoption." But when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, then, all groaning and pain for ever at an end, they will be openly avowed to be the sons of God amid the splendours of the heavenly Court, be clothed upon with the new robe of a free and glorious humanity, admitted to all the rights, honours, and privileges of Divine sonship, and enter on the inheritance on high.

It is this public and splendid recognition, this emancipation from every bond of imperfection, every taint of corruption, this assumption of a free and perfected humanity, for which they wait,

often groaning as they wait. This is their urgent longing, this their inward and sustaining hope. And in this hope, in the sorrow and groaning which it breeds in them as a hope long deferred, in the sweet and sustaining joy with which, as a sure and certain hope, it inspires them, the whole creation sympathizes and takes part. For when the sons of God *are* thus openly adopted into the Divine family, the creation itself also will be delivered from its bondage. When they are adopted, it will be redeemed.

This, at least, was how St. Paul conceived of Man, and man's destiny ; and, as we have seen, he clothes it in a form so noble and lofty as to be worthy of its theme. How far it is true, how far it is confirmed by the facts of our own consciousness and experience, we have had more than one opportunity of judging. When I last spoke to you I advised you to set a poet to interpret a poet, and even gave you some reasons for believing that, on these high religious themes, the poet, the man who fuses reason, imagination, and emotion in a single act, is of all witnesses the most authoritative and the best—his ideas being, as Dr. Garnett says of Emerson's work, "so exquisite and ennobling as to be their own best credentials." Let me, then, in conclusion,

act on my own advice, and quote two of our modern poets on the theme which has now engaged our thoughts. Here, for example, is one of Trench's sonnets :—

To feel that we are homeless exiles here ;
 To listen to the world's discordant tone
 As to a private discord of our own ;
 To know that we are fallen from a sphere
 Of higher being, pure, serene, and clear,
 Into the darkness of this dim estate—
 This thought may sometimes make us desolate,
 For this we may shed many a secret tear.
But to mistake our dungeon for a throne.
Our place of exile for our native land,
To hear no discords in the universe,
To find no matter over which to groan,
 This (oh ! that men would rightly understand !)
This, seeming better, were indeed far worse.

But it may be objected, "Trench was a clergyman, and even an Archbishop ; he is not an unprejudiced witness therefore." I do not in the least sympathize with that objection ; for the clergy are at least as honest as their fellows ; and I see no more reason for suspecting the testimony of a religious man on religious questions than that of a scientific man on scientific questions. Nevertheless, let our next poet be Victor Hugo. In one of his brief lyrical chants,¹ in which he is at his best, Victor Hugo sings thus :—

¹ From *Chants du Crépuscule*, translated by Miss E. R. Chapman, in *The New Purgatory*.

What matter it though life uncertain be
To all? What, though its goal
Be never reached? What, though it fail and flee?
Have we not each a soul?

A soul that quickly must arise and soar
To regions far more pure,
Arise and dwell where pain can be no more,
And every joy is sure?

Be like the bird that on a bough too frail
To bear him, gaily swings!
He carols, though the slender branches fail:
He knows that he has wings.

Between them, these two poets touch almost every point we have covered this morning. They recast in modern forms of speech, and each in his own way they confirm, the great hope which St. Paul offers us—the hope of a final and complete redemption, of our final assumption into “a sphere of higher being, pure, serene, and clear,” for which we are being prepared in these hours of trial and sorrow, bereavement and death. Take that hope home to your hearts, my brethren. You that are still harassed and perplexed by the burden and the weight of all this unintelligible world, and see not how to reconcile the misery of the creature with the goodness of the Creator, dare to believe that misery to be a discipline by which sinful man

is to be delivered from his bondage to vanity and corruption. You who feel the world's discordant tone as though it were "a private discord of your own," and for very pity can hardly believe, dare to believe that all these discords will be resolved into harmony, and serve to enrich the harmony, when we exchange imperfection for perfection, and pass through the gate of death into life everlasting, from our place of exile into our native land. You that have been called to part from some beloved spirit which o'er-informed its tenement of clay, dare to believe that it has but sprung up, from a bough too frail to bear it, into an ampler sunnier air ; dare to believe that you too have wings, and wings on which you will "soar to regions far more pure, where pain can be no more, and every joy is sure ;" and let this great hope comfort you both for yourselves and for those whom you have lost.





V.

THE GROANS OF THE SPIRIT.

"And, in like manner, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered: and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to God."—ROMANS viii. 26, 27.



WE have in this Chapter a trilogy of groans. In Verse 22 we are told that the whole creation, the whole physical universe, groans for deliverance from its bondage to vanity and corruption into the freedom and glory of the children of God. In Verse 23 we are reminded that even

we ourselves groan for deliverance from a similar bondage, the bondage of that which is spiritual in us to that which is carnal, of the higher nature to that lower nature by which we are allied to the physical universe. And here, in Verses 26 and 27, we are told that the very Spirit of God Himself groans with us, and within us, for our deliverance from that hateful and degrading bondage. The universe groans ; we groan ; God groans. The same verb is used throughout ; in all these places the groaning is that which precedes, predicts, and announces a new birth. The same aspiration animates all three actors in this great tragedy which, tragedy though it be, is to have so joyful an ending. It is an aspiration for redemption from a most cruel bondage into a most happy liberty ; and an aspiration which implies its own fulfilment. So that our very groans are our glory, and contain the promise of a still more excellent glory to come. They express our longing for redemption ; and they prophecy that redemption to be imminent and assured.

We have, I said, in this Chapter a *triology* of groans ; and the phrase is more accurate and suggestive than you may at once suspect. For a triology is defined as "a series of three

dramas, each complete in itself, but all, when completed, forming a united and poetic whole." And the Apostle gives us a series of three dramas or tragedies; in the first of which he depicts the agony of the Universe in its endeavour to rise from imperfection to perfection, or the travail of Evolution; in the second of which he depicts the agony of Man in pursuit of the same high quest, or the travail of Humanity; and in the third of which he ventures to depict the agony of God in effecting the deliverance for which both Man and Nature sigh: while yet he implies and assumes that these three separate tragedies are but parts of one sublime drama which is to mount to a close, to terminate in a triumph, more joyful and divine than heart of man can conceive; they all lead up to and predict an august moment in which the Perfect God will look down on a perfected humanity in a perfected universe.

In the course of his great argument, of which I have now given you the thesis and the conclusion, St. Paul makes many bright strokes, employs many pregnant terms, achieves many delicate transitions, which, for the present, we must pass by, and to a few of which I have called your attention in previous discourses.

Our present business is with the third drama of the series, with the part which God, or the Spirit of God, plays in this long agony of the Universe and of Humanity; and we shall have quite enough to do if we confine ourselves—so far as they will let us—to the words before us, and try to master their main lines of thought. Let us then, take these two Verses, sentence by sentence, or, rather, clause by clause, and mark what they have to say to us.

1. The first clause runs,—“*In like manner,*” *i.e.*, in a manner like that in which we ourselves groan within ourselves for our own redemption—“*the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity.*” Our “infirmity” is no doubt, in general, that weakness of our complex and striving nature which incapacitates us for the duties, graces, and honours of the spiritual life, even when we feel and confess this life to be the true life of man.

But the context puts a more specific meaning into the word, and we must take it here as denoting our incapacity to solve that riddle of the universe and of humanity which is the Apostle’s main theme throughout this section of his Epistle, and of which, considered in its more practical aspect, he has given a pathetic delineation in the previous Chapter. The word “in-

firmity" covers and implies our inability to comprehend the mystery of Humanity and of Nature, their bondage to the manifold forms of evil and imperfection under which they groan ; the cruelty and injustice which *seem* at least to attend the uniform action of natural laws, so that the innocent suffer with and for the guilty, and a mistake is punished as severely as a crime ; our amazement and bewilderment when, even after we have been renewed in the spirit of our minds, we discover that we are still unable to do the good we would, that even when we would do good the power to perform we find not. And, in fine, it covers and implies our inability to see the meaning, to grasp the intention of the very discipline by which we are being redeemed from our bondage, or to discern any good end which is to be subserved by the losses, tribulations, pangs, which compose that discipline. Our incapacity to understand the evil and imperfection we find in the natural world, and the too frequent triumph of evil over good in our own nature even when it is renewed, and the very process by which our nature is being disciplined and redeemed,—*this* constitutes our "infirmity," as it has done that of psalmists and prophets in every age ; *this*

reveals the limitations of our nature, and its weakness, and makes us aware both of our own helplessness and of our deep need of help.

It is when we faint before the mystery and the terror of the universal life, and of human life, that we grow most profoundly conscious of this "infirmity," and feel most keenly that we are not wise enough, nor strong enough, for the task imposed upon us by our own conscience and by the law of God, that in and of ourselves we cannot cease to do evil and learn to do well, that we cannot rise from imperfection to perfection. And it is just then, says St. Paul, just when we most need help and feel our need of it, that the Spirit of God "*helpeth* our infirmity," that his wisdom is made perfect in our folly, his strength in our weakness.

And here I must ask you to mark that the Greek verb rendered "*helpeth*," is another of those admirable compounds of which we have already met more than one instance (*συναντιλαμβάνεσθαι*). It means literally (*λαμβάνεσθαι*) *to take a burden on oneself*, (*συν*) *with some one*, (*αντι*) *in his place*. What it means and implies here is that, when we feel the burden and the mystery of all this unintelligible world, or of our own life, or of the Christian vocation, feel it so

keenly that we all but break down under it, and are conscious of nothing so much as of our own inability whether to solve or to bear it, the Spirit of God *takes our burden, in part on Himself*, shares it *with us*, or even, if need be, takes it *wholly* on Himself, and bears it *in our place*, in our stead.

2. *How* He thus comes to our help, we shall see by and bye. But, for the moment, we are called and enabled by the course of the Apostle's thought to make good, to make sure of, the ground we have already traversed. For if any should doubt whether we have really reached what he meant by the word our "infirmity," whether the word here bears and demands the construction we have put upon it, this point is put beyond doubt by his next phrase, which, if its full meaning is to be brought out must be expanded thus: "*For we know not what to ask, that we may pray as we ought.*" Obviously, it is the mystery of our life and lot which makes us conscious of the "infirmity" of which the Apostle speaks: for, according to him, it is when our burden is so heavy and its pressure so painful, when the case is so desperate and the prospect so dark, that we know not which way to turn for relief, or what to wish for, and have

no remedy of our own to propose ; it is when we are so oppressed and bewildered by the difficulty as well as the mystery of life that we do not know what we would have, or what we *ought* to ask ; it is when our very need, our very longing, has grown obscure to us and perplexed, that the good Spirit of God comes to our help.

And who can doubt that such tragic, yet divine, moments come to every thoughtful soul ? They came to our Lord Himself, as when He exclaimed, " Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour ? " For an instant even He, with the cross full in view, knew not what to ask. But it was only for an instant. The Divine Spirit which " abode " with Him, which resided within his breast, came to his help, and moved Him to say, not " Save me from this hour," but, " Father, glorify thy name." St. Paul, in the hour of his infirmity, was quite unable to see what to pray for, though he too strove to pray as he ought, and asked for the wrong thing three times over when he thrice besought that he might be delivered from the thorn in his flesh. But the Spirit helped his infirmity also, and he was enabled to rejoice that, though the thorn was not to be pulled out, he was to receive grace to bear it, and

out of weakness be made strong. And are not we, at times, in a strait betwixt two? unable to determine whether or not it is only our infirmity which makes us shrink from bearing some pain, loss, bereavement which may tell for lasting good upon us, whether we ought to ask for grace and strength to bear our burden and drink of our cup, or whether we ought to ask that the cup may pass from us because we are not able to drink of it, and the burden be lightened, if not lifted, because we are not strong enough to bear it, that the dark cloud we dread may not break on us in a rain of weeping which will exhaust and impoverish us.

3. At such crises, if we seek his help, the Spirit of all grace comes to our help. And if we ask, *How?* the Apostle replies, "He *maketh intercession* for us." And the verb translated "maketh intercession" is another of those beautiful words, or compounds, in which the Greek language is so rich (*ὑπερεντυγχάνειν*). Literally, it means—(*τυγχάνειν*) *to meet with some one*, (*εν*) *in a place agreed upon*, (*ὑπερ*) *who is for us, i.e., who is on our side, in whose grace and favour we stand*. In our grief, perplexity, bewilderment, as we confront the mystery of life, we descend, so to speak, from the observatory of the mind, from

which we can see nothing, or see nothing clearly, get no hint of guidance, no solution of the mystery, into the sanctuary of the heart, where the Spirit has *agreed to meet us*, promised to dwell, and there we find Him waiting for us ; yes, and find Him *for us*, on our side. He sympathizes with us, and we grow conscious of a Love which is willing and able to supply all our need. He clears and reinforces the blind strivings of our nature, which desires to pray aright even when it knows not what to ask. He shares and strengthens our craving for goodness, freedom, perfection. He prays with us, for us, through us. He unseals the sacred springs of trust, and love, and hope within us. Amid all the discords and contradictions of Nature and Life and Thought we seem

to hear a Heavenly Friend,
And thro' thick veils to apprehend
A labour working to an end.

And thus, at last, He both teaches and enables us to pray as we ought—to say, “Father, glorify thy name ;” “Father, thy will be done,” and to rejoice that, though our thorn in the flesh is not extracted, or our cup of agony does not pass away, or our cross is not lifted from our neck, his

grace is sufficient for us. Some such inward process as this is known to every gracious and experienced soul ; and it is this inward experience which St. Paul explains to us when he affirms that, in the hour of our infirmity, the Spirit helps us by making intercession for us.

4. But mark also that the Spirit maketh intercession for us "*with groanings which cannot be uttered*,"—expressing what we cannot express, but expressing it in forms which remain inarticulate, unintelligible, to us, so that we do not understand what it is that He has said even when He has spoken, or groaned, within us. The mystery which perplexed, harassed, oppressed us may not be solved to the intellect ; it may be no nearer solution than before—and, indeed, even the best and wisest of us are still unable to read the great riddle of life : but its pressure is lessened for us, its edge blunted ; we no longer fret against it, because we have felt a Divine grace at work, a Divine love revealed, in the sanctuary of the soul ; because, recognizing God as our Father and Redeemer, and sure that He loves us, we know that all is and will be well with us, and are able to consent to his will, whatever it may be. If we are none the wiser for this experience—and so far as the intellectual solu-

tion of the great mysteries which lie behind our life is concerned, we *are* none the wiser, we are unspeakably the happier, the more resolute, hopeful, assured. For, indeed, to a man who has been brooding over the difficulties of life and duty till he seems to himself as one staggering on, alone and unfriended, under a burden too heavy to be borne, what can be more soothing, what more strengthening, than to become suddenly aware that he is not alone, that his burden is shared, and shared by a friend, and this friend no one less than the almighty and all-gracious Helper whose love and power are enlisted on his behalf? When our sense of trouble, loss, bewilderment, helplessness, has been most keen and cruel, if we have entered into a close and intimate communion with God, his Spirit holding fellowship with our spirits, although in our perplexity and grief we could do no more than cast ourselves on his compassion, lay hand on mouth and be still, because we could not tell what it would be wise or right to ask, we *have* nevertheless felt his Power and Love at work within us ; although He may have helped us in a way so subtle, still, and mysterious that, even while the process was going on, it transcended our intellectual grasp, and, even now, as we look back

upon it, we cannot formulate it, cannot describe, cannot understand it ; while yet its reality is put beyond all doubt by the comfort and relief it has brought us, by the low beginnings of content, or the bright beginnings of hope, which it has quickened within us. We uttered nothing, or nothing but a groan, and yet we prayed with a sincerity, a fervour, a depth beyond that of words—as, indeed, groans do commonly say more than words ; and we received an answer to our prayer so strange and unexpected, so incomprehensible and yet so welcome, that our mouth was filled with laughter and our soul with song. Or, rather, in St. Paul's phraseology, the Spirit Himself prayed with us and for us with unutterable groanings ; *his* prayer being the first answer to *our* prayer, and bringing other answers in its train. The mystery of our life, with its changes and accidents, sorrows and perplexities, was not explained to us, any more than it was to Job when he sat in a like perplexity ; and yet, like Job, we were comforted, and led back to courage and hope and peace, by the mere fact that we had found God in the soul, and at work upon the soul, waking up all the finer parts of our nature to respond to his love, and enabling us to make his will for us our will for ourselves.

5. The 27th Verse need not detain us long if we have at all entered, as I think every tried and godly soul must in some measure have entered, into the sacred and mysterious experience described in the previous Verse, if our own experience has enabled us to follow and appreciate St. Paul's meaning. It opens with, "*And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth the mind of the Spirit.*" The Greek particle ($\delta\epsilon$) here rendered "and" should, I think, have been rendered "but," and probably would have been so rendered had the exigencies of composition permitted, if the word "but" had not been used in the immediately preceding clause of the Verse. For this "but" implies a contrast. *We* do not know what to ask for in those moments of infirmity at which the Spirit comes to our help; we may not even know what we *have* asked for by the groan which the Spirit prompted us to utter. *But* God—*God* knows. The groan of the Spirit, inarticulate and unintelligible to us, has an intelligible meaning and appeal for Him. Even when we do not know what to ask for, or what has been asked for, and feel as if we had not been able to pray at all, He knows what we mean, what we need.

You may reproach yourself for standing before

Him dumb, with not a word to say for yourself, unable to discern what it will be best for you to receive, or even which of warring impulses and desires you ought to prefer ; but He knows what it is best for you to have, what you would ask for if you could, what at the bottom of your heart you really do desire. He needs no words. For He is "*the Searcher of hearts.*" He can read the very pangs, the sighs, groans, cravings, ejaculations, which find no definite, no articulate expression. And, much more, can He who searches and reads your heart, read and interpret the groans of the Spirit in your heart. For He "*knoweth the mind of the Spirit.*" How should He not know his own mind, and what his own Spirit means ?

6. He knows, therefore, that the Spirit can only ask "*according to God,*" only ask, *i.e.*, that the will of God may be done, that his will for us should be fulfilled, that his purpose for our redemption and perfection should be wrought out.

What, then, *is* his will, his purpose for us ? It is, as we learn from Verse 29, that we should be "conformed to the image of his Son," be made perfect even as He is perfect. So that what the blind strivings and dumb outcries of the soul, struggling with its infirmity, come to is a prayer,

and an endeavour, to be changed, to grow up, into the likeness of Christ, the one perfect son of God. *This* is what we ought to pray for, what we do pray for, when the Spirit helpeth us. And this is what the great Searcher of hearts takes us to ask for when the soul is darkened with doubt, and fear, and strife, and has no language but a cry. Even when we stand perplexed before the riddle of the universe, or blind and bewildered by the mystery and the terror of human life, and we cannot order our words before God, and there is no clearness in our thoughts, and we cannot tell what we ourselves need or desire; even when, plunged in a great darkness, we can only sigh, and groan, and look upward, what we really mean, and what the good Spirit of God at work within us means, is, "Thy will, O Father, be done; thy purpose for us be carried out in the darkness as in the light: conform us to the image of thy Son."

Finally, the practical upshot of this wonderful glimpse into our wonderful and mysterious nature and experience as spiritual men seems to be this: that if we had not the firstfruits of the Spirit, if the Spirit of God were not moving and striving creatively within us, bringing light into our darkness and order out of confusion, we should not yearn and groan for the fulfilment of

the Divine ideal, for conformity to the image of God's Son, for a manifest adoption into the Divine family, for redemption from the last trace and stain of our captivity to evil and imperfection. So often as we pray that this gracious Divine purpose may be fulfilled, and even when we cannot *pray*, when we can only yearn and aspire, we may be sure of two things, each of which has a comfort for us far above all the joys of the world.

We may be sure, first, that we have the mind of the Spirit, that the Spirit Himself is interceding for us, praying and striving with us and within us, uttering what we cannot utter for ourselves, asking for and leading us toward a good beyond our thoughts. And we may also be sure that in these prayers of the Spirit we have a pledge that they will be answered to the full, that we *shall* ultimately be so delivered from evil, and so perfected in goodness, as that we shall be satisfied with his likeness whom we love and toward whom we aspire. Every groan for redemption, however obscure its meaning may be to us, however laden with a dumb blind pain, is a prayer, a prayer prompted by the Hearer of prayer. And every such prayer is in itself an answer to our prayers, and the sure promise of a larger answer on its way.



VI.

INFERENCES AND USES.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in (and upon) us."—ROMANS viii. 18.



COMMENCED the brief course of Sermons which I am to close this morning, and which I would fain sum up and bring to a practical issue, by raising the question, "Had the house a builder, or did it build itself?" and by trying to lead you to the conclusion, "Every house is builded by some one, but he that built all things is God." In discussing this question we saw that there are but two plain straightforward

answers to it, only two answers that *are* answers—that of the Materialist and that of the Theist. The Agnostic answer “I don’t know” is no answer; it is but a confession of ignorance. And the quasi-scientific answer, which assumes the whole round of Nature to be the product of Evolution, this, too, is no answer, since, at the most, evolution can only be the method in which the builder worked and works, not the builder himself. So that, if we are to answer the question at all, we must either say, “The House built itself,” or, “He that built all things is God.”

But the answer of the Materialist is open to many and fatal objections. It is inadequate; it does not cover all the facts. It does not account for the presence of law and order in the universe; for what necessity is there that either Matter or Force, unguided by Intelligence, should be intelligible, orderly, law-abiding? It does not account for the *origin* of even force and matter, much less for the origin of life, thought, conscience. It admits that even the ultimate atoms of the universe bear every sign and mark of manufacture, and yet does not explain how they should be manufactured without a Manufacturer. Nor can it ride off on the

assumption that matter and force are eternal ; for, while it affirms that the universe has been evolved by the interplay of force and matter, it predicts that it is to have an end, that, within a calculable period, it will be frozen out or burned up : and that which is to have an end must, one should think, have had a beginning, and a beginning of which the Philosophy which is to explain it should be able to give some account. The Materialist, moreover, is logically bound to be a pessimist, and can offer us no incentives to duty, courage, hope. For, according to him, there is a body but no spirit, a here but no hereafter, a universe, but no Maker and Lord : while even this fair material world, ever rising into finer qualities and nobler forms of life, is at last to be overwhelmed in a catastrophe in which all possibilities of life will be extinguished.

So impotent, and so cruel, is the materialistic hypothesis. It accounts for nothing, explains nothing. It bids us believe that the whole creation has been labouring, through countless ages, toward perfection, without a guide or helper, ever evolving more exquisite and enduring forms of life, only that at last the jaws of darkness may devour them up.

The Theistic hypothesis, on the other hand,

postulates a living and perfect God, an intelligent Creator, all-wise, all-good, almighty, who knows what is best, wills what is best, who can, and therefore must, do what is best. And whatever the objections to which this assumption may be open, it does at least account for the unity of the universe, for its intelligibility, for the presence of law and order, for the origin of life, thought, conscience, as well as of matter and force. It confirms the common instincts and intuitions of our nature which demand that all made things should have a maker, every house a builder, every form of life a living source ; and that hope of immortality so native to the heart of man as to be well-nigh ineradicable, in which all the inequalities of this present life are to be redressed. Though *it* also predicts a catastrophe in which the earth, with all its works, shall be burned up, it transmutes that consuming fire into a quickening, purifying, regenerating flame, and foresees a new heaven and a new earth coming forth from the ashes of the old, a new, higher, fuller life rising out of death itself ; and thus it offers us manifold incentives to a faithful discharge of duty, to courage, patience, and hope under all the changes and chances of time.

And if we must choose between the two, our

choice should not be difficult. We are bound to prefer that which covers the most facts, which most adequately explains them, to which the very constitution and needs of our nature respond most instinctively and happily, and in which we find most to move us to a patient and hopeful discharge of duty.

The gravest difficulty in the way of accepting the Theistic, or Christian, hypothesis is the difficulty we find in reconciling the pain and misery of the world and of human life with the absolute goodness and power of God. And here, as we have also seen, St. Paul comes to our help. *He* admits, he insists, on the pain, the waste, the imperfection, the bondage to vanity and corruption, to be found both in Nature and in Man. He depicts them in even darker colours than the Materialist or the Sceptic. And yet he aids us to bear the burden which seems intolérable. For he does not charge the evil that is in the world to any defect whether in the power or the goodness of the Maker of the world. He charges it, rather, on the self-will, the depravity, of man; as indeed we ourselves do when in our common talk we say, "The world would be a very good world if only men were good enough to live in it." Like Schopen-

hauer, he says, "The world is what men have made it," and hence "the world itself is the judgment of the world." He bids us mark that Nature is in bondage to imperfection and corruption not by its own good will, but to match and correct the imperfection that is in us; and he also bids us mark how heroically she is ever striving upward toward freedom and perfection. He depicts her as standing with raised head, eyes which strain towards the distant point from which she expects deliverance, and with hands stretched out to greet and clasp a deliverance the hope of which she has cherished in her heart through these long years of bondage and sorrow,—as waiting, and even groaning, until the hour of redemption arrive. To him, humanity shares in the bondage of nature, the bondage to imperfection and corruption, resents it as she resents it, strives against it more intelligently and more resolutely, with a still more sure and certain hope of deliverance. If the whole creation groans, stedfastly advancing toward and ardently yearning for deliverance from bondage into freedom, even so also we ourselves, though we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, and in the firstfruits the pledge of the harvest, groan within ourselves, waiting for our redemption, waiting for a public

reception into the perfected family of God. Nay, more, the very Spirit of God groans with us and within us, "making intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered," sighing for the day in which it will no longer have to contend with our infirmity, our ignorance, our corruptions; consoling us in our misery by sharing our misery; not able as yet indeed, owing to our infirmity, to explain the mystery by which we are perplexed, but assuring us that a day will come on which we shall no longer see as through a glass darkly, but shall know even as also we are known.

All this, with much more, has rapidly passed before us in our recent studies from Romans viii., and I have now briefly brought the results of our studies together that you may see at a glance how large and fair the Christian hypothesis is, how much it embraces, how adequately it explains the difficulties by which we are beset, how fully it meets our wants, how it feeds and fills the springs of duty, courage, hope that rise within the soul. It may be "the work of a poet," but "the ideas it embodies are for the most part so exquisite and ennobling as to be their own best credentials."

I must not now stay to remind you of the

many witnesses to its truth which I have cited from what we know of ourselves and of the world around us, and from those poets who "give us the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge"—testimonies which might easily be multiplied ten or a hundred-fold. The time for proof, such proof as is possible, is past, and I have only to point out to you some practical inferences which may be drawn from it, some uses to which it may be applied.

1. First, then, a few words on *the place and dignity which this hypothesis assigns to Man*.

One of the commonest allegations against the Christian Faith is that it degrades man, limits his free development, lowers his position, demands of him a poor and abject spirit incompatible with his true dignity, makes him out other and worse than he is. Yet what truer account of Man's condition can be given than this? that he is not as yet so noble and pure as with his capacities he ought to be, and yet will be; that, not altogether with his goodwill, he has been brought into bondage to imperfection and corruption, so that he cannot reach his highest aims, cannot realize his fairest ideals; that in this unwelcome bondage he groans for deliverance, for ever aspiring to some higher

state of being, with purer manners, wiser laws. In all ages and in all lands men have been conscious of a something deeply wrong in their nature, in their relations to God, to one another, and to the universe. In all ages and in all lands they have yearned and striven for happier conditions, dreamed of a happier future, and have cherished the hope of a golden age to come in which their fetters should be broken off by some great Deliverer, who would lead them, through wisdom and virtue and righteousness, into peace. And what the Gospel does for us, what St. Paul declares it to have done, is,—that it confirms and deepens our sense of something wrong, of some bondage imposed on us to which our will does not wholly consent, but from which we cannot escape ; that it reveals its cause and its remedy ; that it vindicates and defines our yearning for deliverance, our hope of ultimate freedom and perfection. It simply translates the dumb confused groanings of the natural world and of the human heart into an articulate prayer, and assures us that our prayer shall be answered, that our redemption is sure.

And as for putting honour on Man, where in all the schemes or dreams of philosopher or poet will you find man lifted to so high a mark and

illuminated with splendours so pure? What prospect for humanity is worthy to be compared with that which St. Paul unfolds? Where else are men revealed to be the sons of God with such power? Where, outside the pages of the New Testament, do you find the prophecy of a "regeneration" in which men, renewed in the spirit of their minds, shall be publicly adopted into the family of God, and clothed in the robe of a free heavenly manhood, amid the joyful acclamations of the very creation which now groans over their imperfection and misery? You have only to compare the "earnest expectation" of the Apostle with the most sanguine and rapturous visions of philosopher and poet to see in which Man takes the higher place and mounts to the most sublime destiny. *They* speak to us in moving tones of the comeliness, and the grandeur, of Nature, and affirm that man's great task is to penetrate her mysteries, interpret her utterances, conform to her laws, hymn her praise. *This* they conceive to be his highest dignity and honour. But what says St. Paul? In his view Nature, the whole creation, is man's minister and vassal, takes its hue and form from him, suffers for his sins, shares his woe and his hope, and can only attain its perfec-

tion as he is glorified. *They* place man *under* nature, make him the servant of her will,—at worst, the victim of her caprice, at best, the interpreter and laureate of her laws. *He* places man *above* nature, puts all things under his feet, makes him, under God, her lord and king, and suspends her fate on his, instead of suspending his on hers. He portrays her as changing with his changes, as becoming subject to vanity the moment he falls from innocence, as groaning and travailing for his redemption, as watching through the ages with an intent and ardent hope for the hour in which he shall be crowned with glory and honour; and as, at last, rising into freedom and joy when he is declared to be the very and beloved son of God. And if that be to degrade man, what is it to exalt him?

2. Glance at *the certificate of Immortality* which St. Paul places in our hands. Some recent writers, in fiction as well as in philosophy, have set themselves to shew—I can hardly say they have attempted to prove—that the hope of a life beyond the grave is a base and selfish emotion; that men would be better and nobler if, instead of cherishing this hope, they were content to live for the ages that will come after them, for men whose lives will be happier,

though as ephemeral as their own. And there is a tone of self-forgetting virtue in their words which lends them grave effect on immature but generous and aspiring minds. Nevertheless, the whole force of reason and of evidence is against them, if at least we are to believe in God at all. If, indeed, men are looking only for a future life in which they, a chosen few, will enjoy an endless round of personal delights, careless of the wrong and misery of the vast majority of their fellows, their hope is so selfish, so sordid, as to prove them unworthy of eternal life. But if through the grace of God, we are living a useful and a friendly life here, and know how much more blessed it is to give than to receive, what is there of ignoble or selfish in the hope that we may live a still more useful and friendly life hereafter, ever growing more perfect, more serviceable, more bent on helping and more capable of helping our neighbours? O, it is not the extinction of this hope, but its purification, its elevation and enlargement, that men need! and they who are really base and ignoble are those who shrink from the prospect, from the toil and strain, of an eternal life which is also an eternal service.

If, moreover, this hope *were* taken from us,

how could we vindicate the ways of God with men? how explain, how endure, the burden and the pain of life? What of justice is there in condemning long generations of men to agonies of strife and misery, failure and defeat, not for their own discipline and benefit, but that at last a few generations, as frail and mortal as they, may be a little easier in their outward conditions, a little less at discord with themselves, before the end comes and the whole race is swept away? Take from us the hope of a future life in which all the wrongs and inequalities of this present time shall be redressed, and for our use and enjoyment of which these wrongs and inequalities may prepare us, and what is there unreasonable in that universal act of suicide which the Pessimist advises, though, happily, he does not begin to practise it? why should we not at once throw up a game that must be lost?

These modern writers, when they are modest, do not affirm a future life to be impossible. They say that they know of none, or even that no man can know. But what right have they to speak for all men? Here, at least, in St. Paul, is a man who says that he does know. Let us listen to him, then, for a moment, and judge what he has to say. He affirms that men are

the sons of God, and that because the Father lives for ever, his children cannot die. He affirms that Christ, the perfect Man, did not die, that he himself saw Him alive after He had been put to death ; and that, because He lives, we shall live also. He affirms that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ; that if we suffer with Him, if we take part in his strife against evil, we shall share his victory over it and be glorified together with Him. He says, "I have deliberately weighed the one against the other, and I *reckon* that the sufferings of this present conflict are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in and upon us." In the groans of Nature, the groans of Humanity, the groans of the Spirit of God within us, he detects tones which prove them to be groans of travail, of the birthpangs which precede and foretell the advent of a new, purer, happier life ; and he declares that when this wondrous birth of time arrives, all groaning and pain shall be forgotten for joy of the new better man, the new better humanity, that has come into the world. And, finally, rising into a dithyrambic fervour, he sings of the divine

fatherly Love which is ever at work for our redemption, as a Love from which nothing can separate us—neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, neither famine nor nakedness, peril nor sword, in this present age, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor any other and new creation into which we may pass in the ages to come.

Does he not speak like one who knows? Is not his theory a large, a coherent, an adequate theory? Does it not cover and explain the facts of nature, humanity, time? Does it not at once vindicate God's ways with men, and crown man with glory and honour? And yet, through his whole argument and theory there runs this bright thread of life and immortality. If, then, so far as we can follow him, his theory, his hypothesis, verifies itself; if of the two hypotheses open to us it is the only one that does verify itself, shall we not follow him by an act of reasonable faith when he steps beyond the borders of our knowledge, and suffer him to confirm that hope of immortality apart from which life itself becomes an insoluble mystery, an intolerable burden?

3. St. Paul still further lightens and relieves the burden and mystery of life by suggesting

that all we suffer in this present time, whether it spring from natural or social causes, is *a Discipline by which we are being prepared for the larger, freer, better life to come.* This suggestion is not only implied in my text, and in such outstanding phrases as, "If we suffer with Christ *in order that* we may be glorified with him ;" it pervades the whole Chapter. It was, indeed, a kind of axiom with him that "these light afflictions, which are but for a moment " as compared with the permanence of the glory hereafter to be revealed, "*work out* for us," in the most surprising way, and, as it were, by a kind of geometrical progression, "an eternal weight of glory." And, surely, this is a thought which at once commends itself to our experience, so that I need not enlarge upon it. For are we not conscious that it is mainly in these hours of trial, sorrow, defeat, that our principles are put to the test, and our hold is strengthened on that kingdom which is righteousness, and joy, and peace, and our faith in the Providence which caters for a sparrow and numbers the very hairs of our head, as well as our hope of that great coming life which is to make ample and divine amends for all we suffer ?

But what a wonderful and illuminating

thought it is when once we practically apply it! For where is the *burden* of the mystery of life if we not only hope for an immortality in which all the ravelled skeins of time will be pulled straight, but know that all the enravelling of this life, all its strange blending of evil with good, of sorrow with joy, of loss with gain, is intended to exercise us in discrimination, in manliness, in moral capacity and fervour and breadth; intended, therefore, for a discipline by which we shall be educated and made meet for the glory of a future life in which, redeemed from every bond of imperfection, every taint of corruption, we shall rise into an untrammelled freedom, a growing perfection, an eternal usefulness which shall also be an eternal joy? If this be verily so, if we are at last to learn once for all that our wills are ours that we may make them God's, and so may ever see our will done both in heaven and on earth, may not we well conclude, with the Apostle?—"I deliberately reckon, I am fully persuaded, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in and upon us."

Finally, if, despite all that St. Paul has urged, and because of some "infirmity" of your nature or some defect in your experience, or because I

have put the Christian hypothesis so imperfectly before you, any of you are still unable to grasp it, or to accept and rest in it, let me remind you of Browning's weighty words :

God has conceded two sights to a man—
One of man's whole work, Time's completed plan ;
The other of the minute's work, man's first
Step to the plan's completeness.

If you have missed or lost the first, you need not therefore lose the second, or think it of slight importance. It may lead you to the first. If, then, you cannot see "Time's completed plan" ; if the riddle of the painful earth is still a riddle, and still painful, to you, you will do wisely if, instead of brooding overmuch upon it and fretting your heart with the pain of it, you turn to "the minute's work," to the duty that lies nearest to you, and discharge it with all good fidelity. For, in so doing, you will be taking the first step toward making the plan complete, and, in due time, if you faint not, even "the whole work," and the whole meaning of the work, shall be revealed unto you.



VII.

MERCY AND JUSTICE.

Authorized Version. "*Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*"

Revised Version. "*Mercy glorieth against judgment.*"—JAMES ii. 13.



It is of little consequence which of these two renderings we accept, though no doubt that of the Revised Version is the more literal of the two ; for whether it be the joy, or the glory, of Mercy to outstrip Justice, the practical import of the maxim remains the same.

However we render it, I take the maxim to be a quotation with which St. James clenches his argument, or assertion, though whence he

derives it, it is impossible to determine. It may have been one of those "faithful sayings" of the Christian prophets of which there are many more samples in the New Testament than we commonly suspect. Or, as James was the brother of the Lord and must have heard many of his sayings which are unknown to us, it may have been one of those things which Jesus said that are not recorded lest, as St. John puts it, the world should not be able to contain the book. But, in any case, St. James uses it in a manner, with an air, which gives it the force of an authoritative citation. As it falls from his pen, it seems to be an axiom of such wide acceptance and allowed authority that no one will venture to dispute it, that it will suffice to close an argument and put an end to doubt. And if that be so, it is reasonable to attribute the maxim to our Lord Himself rather than to one of the prophets; to conclude that it was one of his sayings, current in the Church though not recorded in the Gospels, like that quoted by St. Paul, "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" since, throughout his Epistle, St. James habitually cites or recasts the words spoken by his Brother and Lord.

But, quotation or no quotation, what does it

mean? Short as it is, and simply as it is worded, it carries only an indefinite sense, I suspect, to many minds; and that, in all probability, because the word "judgment" does not always, or at once, suggest its true and simple meaning to us, *viz.*, the sentence which Justice pronounces on those who have been summoned to its bar. What the Apostle meant, I suppose, was that it is the joy, or the glory, of Mercy to step in after Justice has pronounced an adverse verdict, and to qualify or remit that verdict; and that, therefore, it is the joy or glory of a good man, of a Christian man, to go beyond the demands of strict justice, even when he is compelled to sit in judgment on his fellows and, on the evidence before him, to condemn them. In short, he begs sticklers for justice to bear in mind that mercy has her claims as well as justice, and implies that, in most cases at least, it is impossible even to do men justice apart from a merciful interpretation of their motives and deeds, apart from a generous allowance for the evil influences to which they are exposed and the faults and infirmities to which their flesh is heir.

How admirably this simple straightforward reading of his maxim falls in with the strain and stress of his argument will be apparent if you

glance at the rest of the Verse. He is contending that "judgment without mercy," or "a merciless judgment," will be meted out to those who have shewn no mercy in judging others. And then comes the authoritative maxim, or quotation, "Mercy glorieth against judgment." That is to say, "It is the glory of mercy to step in when strict justice has delivered its adverse sentence, and modify it. If, therefore, you do not suffer mercy to qualify the verdicts you pronounce on your fellows, you sin against both justice and mercy, and must expect that with what measure you have meted out to them, it shall also be meted unto you."

Nor is it less obvious that, read thus, St. James is in full accord with, that he is, indeed, reproducing, the teaching of his Lord and ours in the Sermon on the Mount: "Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you;" and, again, with his teaching in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew xviii. 21-35) in which, after describing the inevitable fate of the man who shewed no mercy though he had received so much, our Lord closes with the words, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if

ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

We may take it, then, on the authority both of St. James and of our Lord, that mercy is as indispensable to those who sit in judgment on their fellows as justice ; and even that it is hardly possible for us to be just unless we are also merciful. We must shew mercy if we would do justice ; and if we would prove ourselves of a truly Christian spirit, we must put mercy *before* justice.

Now if this maxim, thus understood, does not at once commend itself to our reason and conscience, it can only be, I think, because we detach it from its context, and, as a consequence of detaching it, suspect it of a certain softness and flabbiness which do not properly attach to it. For, indeed, it is very far from enjoining a mercy wholly divorced from justice, which takes no account, or little account, of sin and offence, which demands no penitence, no reformation and amendment, on the part of the offender. St. James can be stern enough ; and he would have us to be stern *enough*, though not too stern. Does he not warn us, in the immediate context, that "judgment is without mercy to him that hath shewed no mercy" ? Does he not thus

remind us that God Himself will shew Himself, and does shew Himself, severe with the severe, even as He does and will shew Himself merciful with the merciful? Does he not thus justify severity whenever it is deserved or provoked by severity, or by impenitence, or by continuance in transgression? We *are* to forgive our brother; but we are *not* to suffer sin upon our brother. We are to forgive our brother if he repent and confess his sin; but if he do not repent, if he continue to offend and injure us or our neighbour, justice without mercy may be the truest mercy we can shew him. Our very love for him, if it be a wise love, if it be that true love which is bent on his highest welfare, may command us to rebuke him, or to suffer him to eat the bitter fruit of his own doings until, by chastening and correction, he is brought to a better mind: until, *i.e.*, he repents and renounces his selfishness, his vanity, his ill-temper, his ill-will, or whatever other evil passion may have prompted him to offend. Mercy does not mean impunity. We could do nothing so cruel as to encourage him in his evil ways by lavishing on him a tenderness which will only harden him, or by seeking to ward off from him the natural consequences of his actions, so long as he persists in the evil

course from which these consequences are intended to turn him.

God does not deal so with us, nor would He have us so deal with one another. To keep open a door of escape for him, to urge and beseech him to avail himself of it, to welcome any suffering or sacrifice by which we may bring him through that door—this is the true kindness, the true mercy, to the impenitent ; *this*, and not that which would comfort and pamper him in his sins. It often happens that a man will go on sinning against a friend—against a father, for instance, or a wife—for years, and then cry out on them as of a hard and un-Christian spirit because they do not forgive him before he has sought forgiveness, *i.e.*, before he has repented or brought forth fruit meet for repentance. And it sometimes happens that a man will go on sinning against the peace and welfare of a Church year after year, and then cry out upon it as of a hard and un-Christian spirit because it does not bear with him any longer, or because it does not shew him the love and confidence which he has justly forfeited and has done nothing to recover. But neither the friend nor the Church is therefore un-Christian. They shew the true kindness, the true mercy, in suffering the offender to reap what

he has sown, until he repent and amend his ways. In all this they are imitating God Himself, if at least they do not want the offender to suffer simply, but do want him to amend, and if so soon as he confesses and turns away from his sin, they are ready, and even eager, to forgive, to love and trust him again. He has shewn them neither mercy nor justice; they are shewing him both justice and mercy, and are only too happy to let mercy rejoice over justice the moment he will give them the chance.

On the other hand, we must remember that, even in dealing with the worst offenders, our very justice will not be just unless it be seasoned with mercy, and prompted by a kindly motive.

We have only to consider ourselves, and how many offences *we* commit against both God and man, to know that we ought to lean to pity's side. We have only to remember how many of our offences are unintentional, the result of hereditary tendencies, or of insufficient training, or of unfavourable conditions, or of some sudden passionate prompting alien from our real character, or of some well-nigh irresistible combination of inclination and opportunity, to learn what large allowance we ought to make for the sins of our neighbours—*ought*, I say, as mere matter of

justice. If we could see the hearts of our neighbours as well as their actions, if we could know their histories and measure their temptations, we should not judge them so hardly as we do ; we should feel that hard judgment is unfair and unjust.

Half the offences that are *taken* are not *given*, *i.e.*, they were not meant. The effects of shyness often look like those of conceit, or those of defective sympathy and interest. Ill manners, the result of deficient training and opportunities, are often mistaken for ill-will. Because, for want of practice or dexterity, a man cannot find apt words, the right thing to say at a moment's notice, he is put down as wanting in kindness and goodwill. Because he cannot easily express what he feels, we suspect him of having no fellow-feeling. Because he is anxious to please us, and shews it too plainly, we suspect him of insincerity. Because he is too reserved to shew how much he likes us, we suspect him of indifference. If he is preoccupied and does not talk freely, he is dull : if he talk freely and gaily, he is shallow. If he does not hear what we say, he is inattentive, not deaf, O, dear no, not deaf ! If he does not see and salute us as we pass him in the street, he is not shortsighted, but too proud to acknow-

ledge us. If he does not call on us, he is not too busy, or too sick; he does not care for us. And so, even in these small ways, we misjudge one another. Meaning to be just, we are most unjust, simply because we do not put a little kindness, a little gentleness, a little consideration, into our thoughts and verdicts. Forward to complain if others so misjudge *us*, we are almost as forward to misjudge *them*.

Nor is it otherwise even when graver offences come into view. We too readily believe evil one of another, even if we refuse to speak it. We are capable of suspecting our neighbours of such sins and crimes as wilful untruthfulness, conscious dishonesty, wicked impurity, sordid selfishness, or flagrant extravagance, even when their tried and well-known character ought to be a sufficient defence. Let any malicious person set a lie of this kind rolling, even about one of the best men or women we know, and how fast it gathers weight, circumstance, probability! how easily it finds a certain credence even with those in whom it at first awakens indignation or surprise! Is it because we know so much evil of ourselves that we are so quick to believe evil of others? or is it only because we are too addicted to that vulgar form of curiosity and excitement to which

these malicious inventions minister? How indignant we should be were our friends, without inquiry, to believe such lies of us! and yet how ready many of us are to believe them of *them*, or, at least, to conclude, that "there must be *something* in them"!

Even when such stories are true, when those whom we have admired, or loved, or trusted, do fall into sins to which we should have thought it impossible for them to stoop, ought we at once to forget all that has been kind, good, admirable in them because they have been untrue to their better nature, and to conclude that there is no light in the sun because we have discovered a spot in it, no goodness in those who, being strangely tempted, have succumbed to temptation? Not if we consider ourselves, and our own frailty; and, still less, if we would be just, and let mercy season our justice and rejoice over it. If we have the spirit of Christ, we shall remember how gentle and considerate He was, how little of the Judge, and how much of the Saviour and the Friend, there was in Him; how lenient He was to the sins of really good men, such as Peter, how bent on recovering and reinstating them; how lenient He was even to the sins of publicans, and great sinners who had so few

opportunities of learning and practising goodness. We shall remember that the only men to whom He shewed Himself severe were the men who were severe to others, the "hypocrites" who only pretended to be good, who made their very religion a cloak for pride and greediness, and who nevertheless—or, perhaps, therefore—passed the heaviest censures on better men than themselves, and did to death "the best Man who e'er wore flesh about Him."

To judge men kindly, whatever their faults may be, to mete out to others the measure we would that they should mete to us, to let Mercy revise and modify the verdicts which Justice compels us to pronounce—this is the only proper attitude toward their neighbours which those who follow Christ and breathe his spirit can assume. And even if we have been so happy as to assume and to maintain it, let us not plume ourselves upon it as though we had achieved a strange and more than mortal virtue; for even then we have only done that which it was our duty to do, that which it is our *interest* to do, since they shall have judgment without mercy who shew no mercy in their judgment of others.

But now, finally, does God ask us to do more

for one another than He Himself will do for us all? Does He demand that we should be better than He is, or ever will be? If not, mark how bright, large, and certain a hope streams from the commandment we find it is so difficult to obey. If *we* are to let mercy mingle with and rejoice over judgment, then much more, with *God*, mercy must ever attemper and glory over judgment; much more, *with Him*, must mercy ever step in to revise and to modify the sentence which justice has pronounced.

Our own poet has taught us that

Earthly power doth then shew likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

But we have a more sure word of testimony; yea, and much more than a word. From what God *has done* we may infer what He will do. And *what* has He done, or, rather, what has He *not* done for us? Why

All the souls that are were forfeit once,
And He who best the 'vantage might have took
Himself found out the remedy,

although that remedy could only be reached by the death of his Son. And if, the moment we pass out of this world, God, instead of finding

a remedy for our sins and ills, is to take the 'vantage of our sins, if He is to shew us justice without mercy; if, against all justice even, He is to keep us alive for ever, by a miracle of power, that He may glut his vengeance upon us in an everlasting torment, why, then, He not only does, or will do, what He forbids us to do; He also belies his own nature. He is neither just nor merciful. He is not what He shewed Himself to be when He took flesh and dwelt among us. He cannot be "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" for yesterday He found out the remedy for all the wounds that sin has made; He is applying and administering that remedy to-day; while to-morrow He is to cast away all remedy and inflict on the vast majority of men infinitely deeper and more enduring wounds! O, it is incredible, impossible! God cannot thus deny Himself. Justice without mercy He may shew, for a time, to those who have been unmerciful, or to those "dealers in damnation" who have shewn no mercy except to themselves and the narrow circle with which they have identified themselves; or indeed to all who have persisted in conscious and wilful sin to the last, who have breathed no penitence, attempted no amendment. But this severity is, as we have

seen, the truest mercy to the severe, the impenitent, the incorrigible. It is *meant* for mercy, meant to chasten and correct them, meant to induce penitence and a better mind. And if God is for ever the same, if He is to be true to Himself, if He is not to sink below the level of his own commandments, He who Himself found out the remedy for all the sin and all the sorrow of the world, *must* make that remedy effectual, and restore all his erring and infected children to an eternal health and an eternal home.





VIII.

*THE SEA OF CARE AND THE HARBOUR
OF TRUST.*

A SERMON TO THE YOUNG.

"Neither be ye of doubtful mind."—LUKE
xii. 29.



IF I were to tell you that there is a beautiful parable in the words I have just read, I dare say you would be puzzled to make out what I meant. But are you quite sure that you know what a parable is? The young do not find it easy, I am not sure that we any of us find it easy, to define even the words with which

we are most familiar. Only the other day I heard of a boy who, on being asked by his teacher, "And what is faith?" boldly replied, "*Faith is believing things that we know are not true*"—which was by no means a satisfactory definition of a word so short and so familiar as "faith." And "parable," like "faith," is a word which has puzzled wiser heads than yours. Even the scholars who translated the New Testament from Greek into English did not know sometimes whether to translate the Greek word they commonly rendered parable by the word "parable," or the word "proverb." And, indeed, there is a close connection between these two words; and the short, pithy, picturesque saying which we call "a proverb" easily grows into a parable. For example, if an ancient man of God had said—and both Job and Solomon did say something very like it—"Wisdom is a pearl more precious than much fine gold," that would have been a proverb. But mark how easily this proverb grows into a parable on the lips of the Lord Jesus when, speaking of the highest wisdom and the highest good, He says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found

one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

On the whole, perhaps, we may define a proverb as a compressed parable, and a parable as an expanded proverb ; or we may say that a proverb is a brief, weighty, and picturesque sentence into which much thought and experience have been crushed ; and that a parable is that same sentence, or that same thought, drawn out, dramatized, and made into a tale. And if we do thus define them, we may find in my text both a proverb and a parable.

Even in its present form, "Be not of a doubtful mind," or "Be not of a divided and agitated mind," the phrase has some touch of the weight and sententiousness which mark a proverb. What it lacks is the picturesqueness, the bright and striking comparison, which we look for in our best proverbs. And this is soon supplied, as soon as we look at the Greek instead of the English Testament. For then we see that my text consists of three words instead of six ; a short word (*καὶ*) which means "and," a still shorter word (*μὴ*) which means "not," and a long verb or word (*μετεωρίζεσθε*) which means so much that I dare say you will wonder how any one word can carry it all. It means "to

toss about on the open sea," yes, and to toss about on the open sea as opposed to riding in a port, or harbour, which is at once accessible and safe. So that, taken altogether, these three words—and two of them such short words too!—mean : “*Do not toss about on the open dangerous sea when you may ride safely in a large and sheltered haven.*” And that, surely, is as bright and picturesque a proverb as any man, or child, can reasonably desire.

We have found our proverb, then, and a very beautiful proverb. Now let us look for our parable. To arrive at this, we must glance at the connection in which my text stands, at the discourse of which it forms a part. We must let the main theme of this discourse run into our proverb, and fill up that which is still wanting in it, that which will define or specify “the sea” and “the harbour” of which the proverb speaks.

As, then, our Lord passed through one of the towns of Galilee, He took occasion to repeat the warning against that care for to-morrow, that anxiety for the future, by which men often unfit themselves for the duties of to-day, and rob the present hour of its peace and joy. Once more He rebuked the fretting cares, the baseless fears,

the feverish ambitions, by which our lives are often harassed and laid waste, and set forth the calm and tranquil ideal of life which He would have us cherish and pursue. Once more He bade his disciples consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and learn from them the secret of peace and rest. The birds, He said, have neither storehouse nor barn, yet they are fed ; the lilies neither toil nor spin, yet they are clothed, and clothed more gloriously than the most magnificent of kings. It is God, it is "your heavenly Father," who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds. And if He cares for the flowers that grow in his garden, and for the birds that sing among its branches, must He not care much more for the children who work in it and play in it ? He does care for them, and care "much more" for them. And, therefore, they are not to let what they shall eat and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed, be their sole, or even their main, thought ; they are not to fret about to-morrow and what it may bring forth. Let them seek first the Kingdom of God, which is righteousness and joy and peace, and all these things shall be "added" unto them, or, as the word implies, be *thrown into the bargain*. That very

Solomon who, in all his glory, was not so gloriously arrayed as the wild flowers of the Galilean fields and hills, had sought the kingdom of God first when he preferred wisdom for a right discharge of duty to riches and length of days; and because he asked wisdom to become a righteous man and a righteous King, God *threw in* both riches and length of days,—these being things of but comparatively little worth with Him, mere make-weights to the bargain. Why, then, should men fret and waste themselves, under a constant sense of peril, a constant strain of anxiety and apprehension, instead of relying on the care and providence of their Father in heaven? Why should they toss about on this dangerous sea, when He has provided a harbour in which they may be quiet and secure?

And now, I suppose, you begin to see where our parable comes from. We have only to connect my text with the discourse of which it forms part, we have only to read into it our Lord's invitation to escape from that harassing fear of the future which frets and darkens so many lives, by cherishing a patient and cheerful trust in our heavenly Father's love and bounty, to see its full meaning, and to feel that we have all the materials of a parable at our command.

Had He paused to expand the sentence, the proverb, as we may venture to expand it, and to throw it into the form on which most of his parables were moulded, He would probably have closed his warning against Care and his invitation to Trust with some such words as these:—
“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a harbour both large and safe, into which all who sail across the stormy sea of life may enter and be at rest.”

Now that may be a short, but surely it is a beautiful, parable. And it would have a special force in the ears which first listened to it. For, to the Jews, the sea was very great, and very terrible. It was a symbol of mystery, of separation, of restless adverse power, of all that was dark, and dangerous, and dreadful. And no wonder. For the ships in which they went down into the deep were very small, very unsafe, very slow, as compared with ours. Their sailors had so little science that they were obliged to hug the coast, lest they should lose themselves; and coast voyages are always dangerous voyages. Nor had the Jews, along the whole coast of Palestine, a single harbour worthy of the name, Joppa itself being only what our sailors call a roadstead, *i.e.*, a place

where ships may ride at anchor, at some distance from the shore, and land travellers or cargo in boats, if at least the weather should serve, and provided that, should any adverse wind spring up, they are ready to slip their anchors and fly away. To them, a port or harbour, such as might be found at Tyre or at Sidon in Phœnicia, sheltered from the winds, and where vessels could lie along the quays and unload, would have been invaluable : and it was because *he* valued and wanted to use these two ports, that Solomon the Wise was so bent on being good friends with Hiram, King of Tyre.

Hating and fearing the sea, the Jews who listened to a wiser than Solomon, could not but be impressed when the Lord Jesus told them that, though they had no harbour for their ships, they might have one for their hearts ; that *they* need not sail about in some windy offing, waiting for a chance of communicating with the shore, nor anchor in some dangerous roadstead from which they would have to fly as soon as any storm arose ; but might run into a port large enough to hold all the navies of the world, and where they would be safe though all the winds of heaven should be let loose. And how can *we* fail to be impressed by this same parable

when once we understand that the deep dangerous sea on which we need not toss, on which Jesus Christ begs us not to toss, is that wide sea of care and fear for to-morrow, of apprehension as to what the future may bring, by which so many of our fellows are tormented, and in which they so often make shipwreck of all hope and peace and joy.

Most of us, I suppose, have already sailed on this sea, and know how dark and stormy it is. Few of us, I am afraid, have reached that harbour of rest, that unbroken and unwavering trust in the wisdom and love of God our Father, in which all care and all fear are unknown, and in which we can say from the heart, "The changes that must come, I do not fear to see. I cannot want, for *my Father* will not suffer me to lack anything it will be good for me to have. I fear no evil, for *my Father* is still evolving good from ill. Death itself has no terrors for me; for even in death *my Father* will shew me a path of life, a path to more life and fuller." Most of us, I am afraid, unless we are too young or too silly to think, are anxious at times about what to-morrow may bring with it, and even about what we shall eat and drink, and where-withal we shall be clothed. "We have enough

for to-day ; but shall we *always* have enough ? What, if work should fail us ? What, if health should fail us ? What, if those whom we love, and in whom we trust, should fail us, or be taken away from us ? What if *we* should be taken from *them*, and they should lose our support and love ? What, if life itself should fail us, and we should have to go we know not where, we know not how ? ” These are questions, I am afraid, which even the oldest, even the wisest and best of us, still ask at times, and ask with a sinking heart ; *these* are cares and fears by which we still suffer ourselves to be fretted and depressed, waves of that great sea by which we are tossed to and fro, and up and down.

Even the youngest of you, even those of you who still believe that Father and Mother can do anything for you they have a mind to do, and are very sure that they will not let you lack anything they can get and think it right to give you—even you have some things which you fear, about which you are careful. You are afraid of the darkness perhaps, and cannot bear to go to bed alone and in the dark, because the night is full of mystery to you, full of dangers which you cannot define. Or you are afraid of illness, if only because it brings the doctor to you, with

his nasty potions and pills, and cuts you off from the garden and the playground. Or you fear the anger of your father, or even of your mother, and certain sharp ways they have of correcting you when you go wrong. Or, better still, you fear the shame of *being* wrong and of doing wrong even more than the pain of being punished and corrected for going wrong. And so even you are, in your way and measure, tossing on the waves of that big sea of Care and Fear which runs all round the world, and breaks on every shore, flooding the little creeks and inlets as well as the wide estuaries and bays.

Do not even you, then, need a port, or harbour, into which you may run and be safe? Jesus says you may find such a harbour in Trust, trust in the love and care of your Father in heaven. And children quite as small as you have found that true. A few months ago, a child of some five or six years of age, had said her prayers one evening, and was lying in her bed between sleeping and waking, her mother sitting by her side till she fell asleep. As she lay there in her drowsy mood, she was overheard saying under her breath,

“Poor God! Poor God! *Poor* God!”

"But why do you pity Him, Alice?" asked her mother. "Because," said the child, "*because He has to sit up all night to take care of little children.*"

That was very pretty of her, was it not? and at least as pretty to God Himself, I think, as it is to us: for, if I know anything of our Father in heaven, He must have been more pleased with the gentle pity and thoughtfulness of that innocent and kindly heart than with many a solemn function of public worship. But do you not also see what a treasure such a thought must have been to little Alice herself? What terror could the darkness hold for her when she was so sure that God, her kind Father in heaven, was sitting up all night to take care of her and of all little children? *She* had taken shelter in the harbour of a simple trust in God, and knew that she was safe, let the winds rave and blow as they would. And *you* will find safety and rest from all you fear, whatever it may be, if only you are sure that God is your Father in heaven, and loves you as much better than your earthly father, or even your mother, as the heavens are high above the earth. For God is all-wise, and knows what is best for you; all-good, and will give you what is best; all-powerful, and can give you what it is

best for you to have. No one of you is too little, or too weak, to love Him, and to put your trust in Him ; to believe, with little Alice, that He watches all day and sits up all night to take care of little children. And if *He* is taking care of you by night and by day, of what need you be afraid ?

And now, finally, a few words with you elder ones, who are no longer children, but young men and women, though I hope none of you have quite lost the heart, and the faith, of a little child.

To *you* the invitation of our Lord should be very welcome ; for you are old enough to know that life brings many cares with it, and many fears, the moment we try to live it without God. You know, too, that care dulls and chills the soul, so that if, on any occasion, you are over-anxious to do your best, your anxiety defeats itself, and you do your worst instead of your best. You know that fear absolutely paralyses the soul, so that, while its cold touch is upon you, you no longer have your faculties at command, and cannot do even what it would be quite easy for you to do if only you had "a cheerful courage on." You know that fear cannot see straight, or strike straight, or aim true. Will you not, then,

spring to meet any chance of deliverance from care and fear ?

Christ offers you more than a chance. He promises you a sure deliverance. He opens a harbour for you in which you will be safe in all weathers, and under all changes of the weather ; and He invites you to leave the sea on which so many drift with the tide upon the rocks, or are driven on the rocks by strong winds and fierce.

What are you careful about, and why should you be careful ? What is it that you fear, and why should you fear it ?

You fear failure, perhaps, mischance, want. Or you fear sin, and the punishments that wait on sin. Or you fear death, with its separations and bereavements, and what may follow death. Is trust in God, then, a sufficient refuge and safeguard from these cares and fears ? If you believe that He is your Father ; if, *i.e.*, you believe that He loves you, and that nothing can separate you from his love, will this faith in Him deliver you from these fears and cares, and give you the courage and the cheerfulness without which you cannot do your best ? I do not see how you can doubt it. At least I do not see how you could doubt it if those of us who profess to believe in Him were not so anxious, so fearful,

so meanspirited and incapable, so untrue to our convictions, as we often are. For, again I remind you, your Father is all-wise, and knows therefore what is best for you ; all-good, and wills therefore what is best ; all-powerful, and can do therefore what is best : and if He can, He *must*. He Himself has assured you that all things, even poverty, and sickness, and death, are his servants, and must therefore serve you for your good : for upon whom should the Father's servants wait if not upon his children ? Nay, He has promised you that, in life and in death, He will never let you lack anything it will be good for you to have, never withhold from you any gift which you can use for your own and for the general welfare. And, indeed, what sort of a father would he be who was able to give his children whatever it would be well for them to have, and yet did not give it to them ?

It would seem, then, that there is only one thing left for you to fear ; *vis.*, sin and the punishment it breeds. And I don't think you can fear sin too much, if you fear it at the right time, in the right way, though you may easily fear its punishment too much. For the punishment of sin is the best thing about it ; since it shews that, despite our sins, our Father still loves

us well enough to correct us when we go astray, and correct us, of course, that He may bring us back.

Even sin itself may be feared wrongly, as well as rightly. The right way to fear sin is to fear it *before* we commit it, so to hate and dread it as not to commit it. And the wrong way is to fear it *after* we have committed it, or so to fear it as to doubt whether we can ever get quit of it. When once we have fallen into a sin, our only wise course is to confess it, to cast it away from us, and to refuse, in God's name and by his help, to yield to it again. Even sin itself is not to be so feared as that we shall be afraid to acknowledge it, or to strive against it, or think that it can never be forgiven or overcome. Does not every good father forgive his children up to seventy times seven? does he even reckon up how many trespasses he has forgiven, and feel that at seventy times seven he must stop? And shall not God forgive you, how many soever your sins may have been, and still help you to mend and to do that which is right?

All anxiety that frets the soul, all fear that daunts and paralyses the soul, is forbidden; from all *this*, whatever its source, we may be saved by trust in the love, the grace and bounty, of our

Father in heaven. It is from the buffetings of this kind of care and fear that our Lord invites you to take refuge in God. To each one of you He virtually says by the parable before us : " Do not toss about in this dirty sea of Care and Fear, so far from the heavenly shore, where you can never be at rest, never be secure ; but sail right on into the harbour of Trust, trust in the Divine Love, where no storm can reach you, where there is no danger, no fear ; where He who holds the winds in the hollow of his hands will surround you with a great and perpetual calm."

And I, in common with many of your elder friends who are here, can bear witness that to embrace and respond to this invitation, as it is the only, so also it is a most true and certain, way of peace. We have our weak moments, as I have confessed, and even our weak hours ; moments and hours in which we yield to anxious forebodings and fears, and are untrue to our best and deepest convictions ; and we have to pay a heavy price for them, worthless as they are : but sooner or later these convictions come back to us and assert their power. The thought of the Divine fatherhood and love springs up in our hearts again, and silences our clamorous fears ; on us, who sat in darkness, there rises a great

light. We, some of us, have known what it is to face want—want of money, want of work, want of friends, want even of natural courage and hope ; and though at times our hearts have been torn with care and fear, it was simply because we lacked trust. The conviction that God, the Father of all men, was *our* Father, and was ruling and overruling all the mischances of time for our real good, has returned to heal all our wounds, and to indue us with a fortitude, a patience, a power to stand, and wait, and hope, which was not our own, and yet was made our own. We, therefore, can testify that trust in God, whenever we could hold it fast, has always brought us tranquility, and courage, and peace. And because we have tried and proved it for ourselves, and earnestly desire that you should be at peace amid all the hurry and din and commotion of life, we beseech you also to put your trust in the Love which has never failed us, and never can fail.



IX.

THE LESSONS OF THE ROD.

"The voice of the Lord crieth unto the City—and it is wisdom to fear his Name—Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."—MICAH vi. 9.



WITH this Verse the Prophet commences a new section, or paragraph, of his discourse. In the previous section he had called on the mountains and the hills to listen to and adjudge a controversy between Jehovah and Israel. He had portrayed Jehovah as opening the controversy with a challenge in which He reminds the people of Israel of how much He has done for them since He brought them up out of the

land of Egypt, and of how little He has required of them—requiring nothing, indeed, but that they should seek their own good by doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with Him.

To this challenge, “O, my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?” they make no response, and perhaps do not care to respond. A sinful people, they shew no sign of contrition; an elect people, they shew no sign of grace. They are absorbed in the intrigues and chicaneries of the market, carrying a deceitful tongue in their mouth and a deceitful balance in their hands. Calling themselves a holy people, assuming to be the favourites of Heaven, they are not commonly honest, not commonly veracious. Hence the Prophet represents Jehovah as changing his tone. The mountains and the hills have given their verdict against Israel; the very voice of Nature, *i.e.*, has pronounced against these pious liars and cheats. And God is prepared to carry out the sentence, to chastise them for their sin and hypocrisy. He will bring up the fierce Assyrian against them, and deliver them over to slaughter, famine, and captivity. *This* shall be the rod with which He will smite them in his anger.

But in the midst of wrath He remembers mercy ; even when He is denouncing doom on them, He lets "mercy season justice." He opens the very sentence against them by beseeching them to *listen* to the rod with which He is about to smite them. "The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city," the wicked city of Jerusalem, soon to be abandoned to its foes ; and in proportion as they are wise they will listen to that voice¹—the voice which cries, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."

Even from this brief exposition it will be obvious, I hope, that the large general meaning of the Verse, its meaning for *us*, is, that the calamities which befall us, the punishments which tread on the heels of offence, have a teaching or disciplinary intention ; that the Rod with which we are chastised has lessons for us ; and that, in proportion as we are wise, we shall learn these lessons and lay them to heart.

¹ The original of the second and parenthetical clause of the Verse is very difficult to translate, and many different renderings of it have been proposed ; but, so far as I can see, the substantial meaning of all these renderings is the same. They all concur in proclaiming it the part of wisdom, or of the wise, to listen with awe to the voice of God's rebuke, to recognize, or to reverence, his presence and will in his Word.

No doubt the thought is a familiar one ; but it is one on which the changes and accidents of time compel us to meditate again and again. Any new form or setting of it is, therefore, very welcome to us. And Micah at least furnishes us with so much as this. He clothes the abstract thought in an impressive figure ; and, if we consider this figure, it may lend freshness and force even to a thought so familiar as the teaching and discipline of Affliction.

I. Probably the first thought it will suggest to us is this: that, were we "swift to hear," there would be no need of the Rod. In *this* life, at least, God is training us for wisdom and goodness, in order that by and bye we may serve Him with a perfect heart. He is seeking to make us partakers of his own righteousness, that we may be partakers of his own peace and blessedness. And were we, while at school, to learn the lessons He sets us with diligence, and mind our manners, and do our duty, He who does not willingly afflict the children of men would not have recourse to the rod. It is we who by our indocility, our undutifulness, our self-will, or our open and flagrant disobedience to his commands, compel Him to chastise and correct us.

Had the men of Israel, whom He had long trained to veracity and integrity, spoken truth with their lips and dealt uprightly with each other ; had they done justice, loved mercy, and walked reverently with Him, He would not have laid on them the fierce Assyrian rod. And were we apt to learn the lessons He is teaching us, were we to grow in righteousness, charity, and reverence, were we to value and pursue these virtues and graces above all else that the world holds, He would not need to chastise us, to drive us by chastisement whither He would have us go, in the way that we *ought* to go. We are only set to learn the lessons of the Rod when all that authority, love, and patience can do has failed to produce its proper effect upon us. God does not chasten us for his own pleasure, but for our profit, that we may be "partakers of his holiness," that we may bring forth, and enjoy, the fruits of peace and righteousness.

2. He Himself assures us that this is, in general, the function and errand of the Rod. But, besides this general effect of discipline, the Rod has specific lessons to teach us, lessons which are to be inferred from the offences it is used to correct. And though, at times, it is very difficult, if not impossible for us to make

out by what offence the Rod has been provoked, or what good end of discipline it can serve, yet, often, its special errand is clear enough, if only we are set on discovering it. The lessons it was sent to teach the Jews of Micah's age were, as the Prophet told them, simply the common lessons of veracity and honesty. Its general errand was, no doubt, to remind them of how much they owed to God, how entirely they depended on Him, and to draw them back into fellowship with Him : but its specific message was, "Be truthful, be honest, or you can never prosper and be at peace." And it does not tax a profound insight into the facts of human life to see that, when a whole nation has become unjust, dishonest, deceitful, so that no man can take his neighbour's word or trust him to act with common fairness, it is on the road to ruin, and *must* either amend or perish.

There are certain sins which no man can commit with impunity, sins which every good conscience condemns, sins so injurious to the common weal that they meet with speedy, if not immediate, punishment. Such sins as habitual falsehood or drunkenness, flagrant dishonesty or impurity, seldom escape censure long ; they run before to judgment. Even if the man who

is guilty of them does not bring himself within the grip of the law, he comes under the social ban. His neighbours cease to trust him, or they cease to respect him. They will not have him in their houses, or they do not care to do business with him. He loses his place, or his customers. On such sins as these the Rod falls swiftly, heavily, and at times with what seems an undue and cruel weight. And it speaks very plainly. It leaves the sufferer in no doubt as to what his sin is, what the lesson he has to learn, what the direction in which he is to attempt amendment. Best of all, the Rod falls that he *may* learn this lesson, falls, *i.e.*, not for punishment alone, but for correction and to induce amendment.

This, indeed, is the most valuable, because the most hopeful and inspiring, truth taught by the Verse before us. For here God Himself assures us, by the mouth of the Prophet, that the Rod comes, not to crush the sinner into despair, but to call him to repentance and improvement. Why, else, does He beseech us to *hear* the rod which we have compelled Him to use? It is not the Rod of which we are to think mainly, but *the lesson* of the Rod; not the suffering which it inflicts, but the rousing call and

kindly invitation which it utters. And if men could but believe, as they teach their children to believe, in this kindly and gracious intention of the Rod, if *we* could but believe in it, should we not take all the pain and shame of it patiently, if not cheerfully, because of that joy of correction and amendment which it comes to enforce, because of that proof of a watchful and educating Love which it affords? Instead of losing hope, or hardening ourselves in iniquity, or lifting a resentful and mutinous face to Heaven, we should find in the Rod a warning indeed against sin, but also an invitation to contrition and obedience.

Let us remember, then, that God Himself employs the Rod in vain unless we listen to the Rod, unless we learn the lessons it comes to teach, and respond to the invitation it comes to bring.

As there are open and flagrant sins which provoke a speedy, or an immediate, sentence, judgment treading on the very heels of offence, so there are patent defects of character—such as ill-temper, an inordinate selfishness or self-conceit, an imperious or a censorious habit, which are not always recognized as equally sinful with those grosser sins of which I have

spoken, though they are commonly quite as sinful, and often still more sinful and injurious; and these defects, like those sins, cry aloud for correction, and meet at times with a punishment equally prompt and severe. No man whose character is lowered and defaced by them can long be unaware of them, even though he should not fully recognize their guilt. The extravagancies into which they hurry him, the ferment of passion they excite within him, or the resentment and aversion of those around him, soon bring home to him a sense of his infirmity, and of the danger in which he stands. These are God's rod, his rod of correction. Whatever our neighbours may intend by the attitude they assume toward us, or by the actions in which they express their resentment and dislike, *God* intends our amendment, our welfare. He is calling our attention to defects of character which, if not corrected, will infallibly inflict a lasting, if not a mortal, injury upon us, and is both commanding and imploring us to correct them. He is framing and imposing a discipline, He is even weaving the dislike and resentment of our neighbours into a discipline, which, if we profit by it, will stimulate us to strive against and strengthen us to conquer our faults and

defects. He lifts the rod only that we may learn the lessons of the rod—learn to be good—instead of ill-tempered, unselfish instead of selfish ; learn to replace conceit with humility, imperiousness with gentleness ; learn to esteem and serve each other instead of being quick to judge and censure one another.

And, again I say, if we could but believe in this gracious corrective intention of the Rod, if, while we smart under it, we could but hear the Master's voice beseeching us to "listen to the rod" and to learn its lessons, all the bitterness of our schooling and discipline would disappear. We should feel, and rejoice to feel that, because we are his children, because He loves us, God will not suffer any fault or defect in us, and can be content with nothing short of our perfection.

3. Even yet, however, we have not touched the core and heart of our theme. When punishment is obviously the result of a sin, so that we can trace the connection between them ; or when discipline is obviously adapted to certain defects of character of which we are conscious, or of which it makes us conscious ; when, in short, we know what the Rod comes for, what lesson it has to teach, it may not be absolutely easy, but it is comparatively easy, to endure chastening, if

at least we are of those who wish to learn, who care for character, who want to grow, who aim at perfection. The difficulty begins when the mystery begins ; when we don't know what the Rod comes for and cannot find out ; when, try as we may, we cannot see what sin, or what defect, it is intended to correct, or what good end it can possibly serve, whether for us or for others. And that this mystery does often enshroud the ways of God with men, that we are often quite unable to discern the meaning and message of Affliction, even when we are bent on mastering them, no man will deny who has either attempted the Christian life for himself, or is at all familiar with the recorded experience of good men.

Doubtless it is true, as we are often reminded, that the end or purpose of Affliction might be discovered far oftener than it is, if only we sought it more honestly and resolutely. Doubtless it is also true that a competent bystander may often see what it comes for when the sufferer does not or cannot see. Nevertheless both our reading and our experience must have taught us that at times "God moves in a mysterious way," that the best men, such as some of the Hebrew psalmists, have stood perplexed, amazed, sorrowful, indig-

nant, under a weight and pressure of calamity for which even they, learned in the ways of God as they were and prescient of things to come, could find no adequate cause, and in which they could see no likelihood of good effects. And, indeed, I think we must all have known some such cases ourselves. For example, a man is cut off from all the wholesome uses of life just when he is most bent on self-improvement or the service of others ; a father dies in the prime of life, just when his life is most valuable, and, by no fault of his own, he leaves his children so ill-provided for that they lose the good education, the good example, the good start, he would have given them, and spend all their days on lower levels of thought, labour, service, influence, than they might have occupied, even if they do not sink into penury and vice and misery ; a saintly woman, who has carried light and comfort into many homes, many hearts, falls sick, and lingers long on a dying bed, her mind all clouded with doubt and terror, till she loses touch with God and despairs of her own salvation ; a wise and godly man, who has spent his whole life in the service of others, who has been a teacher of many and a succourer of many, is crippled or deranged by some slight accident, or by some mysterious

change in the structure of the brain, and becomes a burden and a grief to those to whom he had been a comfort and support; or a minister of the Word is disabled for his vocation just when he is most likely to do good, when study and experience have broadened and mellowed his thoughts and his spirit has grown most simple and devout, or just when those who listen to him are most likely to be touched and benefited by his words—disabled, too, not by some tragic catastrophe or sudden stroke, but by some creeping disorder or infirmity to which he is ashamed to succumb.

Before such cases as these, with many more, and many deeper, tragedies which they may serve to suggest, we stand perplexed and dismayed. However bent we may be on learning the lessons of the Rod, we cannot make out what, or what adequate, lesson it has to teach, or who is to be the better for it, although it is easy enough to see who is likely to be the worse. Does the Prophet, or God through the Prophet, help us at this sore pinch? Has He any light to throw on this dark mystery?

Yes, my brethren, He throws a most welcome and consolatory light upon it; and it is mainly for the sake of this light that I have asked you to

consider the Verse before us. For, besides bidding us "listen to the rod," He also bids us remember "*who hath appointed it.*" *We* may not be able to see for what end of correction or discipline it has come ; and, perhaps, it is more than a little bold of us to expect that creatures so imperfect and so limited in faculty should be able to grasp the whole scheme of our life, and understand, nay, foresee, to what good end all its changes, events, and accidents, will round : but all things are naked and open to God, who sees the end even from the beginning. *We* cannot tell what to-morrow may bring forth, and cannot, therefore, see what good end the discipline of to-day may serve when to-morrow comes. But all the days, and all the morrows, of time, with all that they have brought forth or will bring forth, are known to the Inhabitant of Eternity. And what I understand the Prophet to ask of us is that, even when we *cannot* see for what the Rod comes, we should remember that *God*, who wields the Rod, *can see*, and put our trust in his wisdom and love. "Listen to the rod," he seems to say ; "learn its lessons as often and as fast as you can : but when it seems to have no lesson, when, try honestly as you will, you cannot make out what faults it is to correct, what good end of

discipline it is to serve, remember *who it is that has appointed it*, and confide in Him. Because it comes from God, it must have some gracious intention, must, in some way, be meant for your good. Trust in Him, then, and what you see not now, you shall see hereafter."

Is that an unreasonable demand on our faith? Is it not, rather, a most welcome and valuable aid to faith, if only we bear in mind that it is a word of God, that it is He Himself who makes this appeal to our confidence?

No man who has known God, and enlisted in his service, will pronounce the demand unreasonable. *We* can see but a little way before us at the best; *He* can see all the way, even to the end. Should we not trust Him, then, more, and rather, than ourselves? Much that once perplexed and dismayed us, much in which we could see no promise of good, much that seemed purely evil to us and capable of producing nothing but injury, misery, or the disappointment of our fondest hopes, has turned out to be for good, and even for a good large and enduring enough to outrun our hopes.

Which of us can look back upon his own history, or upon the history of this Church, and not acknowledge that many of the changes, the

losses, the accidents over which he once lamented, over which even he may have despaired as over an irremediable injury, were meant for good, and have turned out for good? Should we not trust Him, then, whose wisdom and goodness we have proved? If any cloud, or darkness, now hang in our sky, shall we not believe that this cloud too will turn its silver lining on the night, and this night, like so many which have gone before it, will brighten into day? If our hearts are sad and dejected as we look forward to any approaching change, whether in our personal or our Church life; if any Rod seem hanging over us, let us by all means learn the lessons of the Rod, renouncing the faults, sins, defects, it is sent to correct; but even if we *cannot* see what it comes for, and what it should stir us up to do, let us remember that He who has appointed it has often brought real and enduring good from seeming evil, answering our prayers and fulfilling our hopes by the very chastenings which dismayed us. Let us go resolutely and cheerfully on our way, leaning on Him who never has failed us and never will fail. Let us say, "*I cannot see what it means, or what good it will do. But He can.*" And I know who it is that has appointed it, and that He means well by me: and hence I must and will put my trust in Him."



X.

THE ESSENTIALS OF RELIGION.

A FAREWELL DISCOURSE.

"Finally, brethren, farewell."—2 CORINTHIANS xiii. 11.



It is twenty-five years to-day since I first stood here as your minister and pastor. Ever since then it has been my habit—as indeed it had been my habit, in other pulpits, for twelve previous years—to take some passage of Scripture for my theme, and to invite you to study and apply it. I may therefore assume, perhaps, that I have earned a right to dispense

with a text for once, or to use it simply as the motto which an author prefixes to an essay, making it however as approximate as he can.

For once, then, I will give you a homily or an address, instead of an exposition. Not that I am about to review the course of my ministry among you, or to indulge in pathetic allusions to the changes which time has wrought. I have already said, I hope, all that need be said in the way of affectionate remembrance of the past and earnest exhortation for the future, at more private meetings of the Church and Congregation ; while, as to the spirit in which our approaching separation should be faced, I have nothing to add to what I said in a sermon on *The Lessons of the Rod*, which I recently delivered.

Moreover, I do not think it would be wholesome for you, or for me, that I should recount what you have achieved during the quarter of a century we have been together, and sound a trumpet before you which, while ostensibly blown in your praise, would be secretly intended for my own ; or that I should be for ever fingering a pathetic string in a minor key. It will be better for us both that, so far as possible, I should divert your minds from that tone of personal

reminiscence and emotion which is sure to obtrude itself quite sufficiently, do what we may, and lead you to reflect on some of the large, general, and therefore simple, facts and truths which lie at the foundation of all right religious thinking and action.

Now there is one such line of thought which I am anxious to lay before you before I vacate my pulpit, and which I believe to be of no small value, since it has already proved most valuable to me, although I lit upon it by a sort of accident. Suffer me, then, to tell you what it is and how I came upon it.

During the long illness which cut the first three or four months of this year out of my life, I spent a few weeks in a large country-house, full of guests—there were some fifty of us—among whom there were representatives of many types of religious thought and experience, from those who held the most orthodox creeds in the most mechanical way, to those who had openly revolted from those creeds, and had fallen into scepticism or indifference. Some of them habitually spoke of “the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity” as if they were three separate celestial Figures running about in the sky, each bent on a separate errand, and each assuming a

different attitude toward the children of men,—a trinity indeed, but a trinity without unity ; nor were the pious souls who took this tone in the least aware that they had dropped the “unity” from their thoughts and were belying the dogma they professed to believe ; or they spoke of casting themselves wholly on “the merits of *the blood* of Christ” in a way which plainly declared that, in their judgment, the mere spilling of physical blood could produce the most marvellous spiritual effects ! Others were in a quandary, in a strait between two, because, having been trained, and having lived under the influence of this lifeless and mechanical theology for many years, they had heard some report of a new theology, of a new and more living way of interpreting the Word of God, and were in doubt whether they should not exchange their old lamps for new. While still others had found the bed of the creed in which they were cradled too short for them to stretch themselves in, and its blanket too narrow to wrap themselves in, and were half-minded to burn their old cradle and to do without bed and blanket altogether : in other words, because they had not heard of any larger and more reasonable form of religious thought than that which had grown incredible

to them, they were drifting away from the religious life into a confirmed scepticism, and felt, not without sadness and awe, that they were without a God whom they could love or a hope that they could cherish. In my conversations with these chance neighbours I felt my need of some common ground on which I could meet them all ; and at last, without much foresight or intention, I found myself saying very much the same thing to them all, however different their positions or needs might be.

Now I do not doubt that, in some measure, these different types of religious thought and experience are represented here this morning ; and hence, instead of telling you what I said to the friends I met some two or three months ago—for some of them became my very good friends before all was done—allow me to address myself directly to *you*, since it is to you I am speaking, and with whom I wish to leave what it will be well for you to bear in mind.

If, then, we are bent on discovering what is really essential to religious thought and life, what ground we may all hold in common, and from which we need not fear to be dislodged by any advance of science or criticism, or any wind of doubt, we shall do well to begin at

home and to "look within;"—begin by studying ourselves, the facts of our own experience, the needs and cravings of our own hearts.

And the most simple, patent, and momentous fact which any man bent on truth and goodness discovers about himself is, I suppose, that he is not what he ought to be, or even what he fain would be, and that by no effort of his own can he make himself what he would be. He has aims which he cannot reach, an ideal which he cannot actualize. At times even the will to do good is not in him; and even when he would do good, the power to perform is often absent. Despite Emerson's famous couplet, even when the voice of Duty or of Conscience says "Thou must," he cannot always respond "I will and can." Here, then, we come on what theologians call the fact of *sin*, a word which means missing the true mark, wandering from the right path. Will any man who knows himself deny this fact—deny that, in this sense, he is a sinner? Will any man, however well he may think of himself, claim that he always hits the true mark, that he has always kept the right path, or even that in future he always will keep it?

Convinced of sin, our inquirer looks round him and sees that, while all men are under the

same condemnation with himself, even the best, some men are at least a little better than himself, that they hit the mark oftener and do not so often wander from the path of duty. If he asks them why, they tell him that they are naturally just as weak, just as infirm of purpose as he is, just as prone to go astray, but that they have found God, and have learned to love and trust Him; that He has helped and is helping them; that He is shewing them what his will is and constraining them to do it. Where is he to find God then? In the universe in which he dwells he may find, as we have lately seen, many indications of the existence and rule of God, of a God who is all-wise, all-good, almighty, who knows what is best, wills what is best, and can do what is best. He consults the friends to whom he looks up as better than himself, and they affirm that the God, of whom Nature speaks in hushed and mysterious tones which it is not given to every ear to catch, has clearly revealed Himself, his character and will, in the pages of the New Testament and, above all, in the person and teaching, life and work of Jesus Christ. He reads this book for himself, bends his own mind and heart upon it, and finds that it is at least as well authenticated as any book

of its age ; that if he believes that Cæsar lived, did the deeds, wrote the commentaries ascribed to him, it is just as reasonable to believe that Christ lived, and did the deeds, and spoke the words ascribed to *Him*. Better still, he finds in the teaching of Christ words that awaken a response in his own heart, which verify themselves in his own consciousness and experience, and the revelation of just such a God as he needs and craves ; a God who is the Father of all men, who loves them all, who forgives their sins, who helps their infirmity, who brings his strength into their weakness, who both can redeem and promises to redeem them from the bondage to imperfection into which they have fallen, to make them what they would be and even far better and nobler than they have ever dreamed of being. He accepts this revelation ; he lifts up his heart to this fatherly and redeeming God ; he confesses his sins, and feels that they are forgiven by the new hatred of evil, the deeper love of goodness, quickened within his soul ; he asks for strength and grace to do his duty, and finds a strength beyond his own coming to his aid. And so, because he has found God in the Word, and has also found the words and promises of God in part fulfilled

already in his own experience, he casts himself upon Him and believes that, though many failures, defeats, and sorrowful disappointments may still lie before him, this gracious Father and Friend will see him well through them all, and satisfy the deepest cravings of his heart for truth and goodness.

I need go no further ; for *these* are the simple facts and verities which lie at the foundation of all true religion, which are common to all who hold the Christian Faith. They have been confirmed in the consciousness and experience of many men, and many races of men, through a long series of ages, and I trust also in your experience. Look at these simple facts and verities with the eye of a theologian, and there start up at once an innumerable array of questions—since these facts, like all others, are based on unfathomable mysteries—questions which no man can adequately answer, which at least no man can so answer as to command universal assent. Take the fact of *sin*, for example, and you may ask, “Is it personal or hereditary? Are *we* wholly responsible for our transgressions, or are our ancestors, right up to the first, responsible at least in part? Do not our moral weakness and failure spring of necessity from our

being what we are, in such a world as this? Is man's will free, or is it bound in iron chains of necessity? Are there not unseen evil influences and powers at work upon us which we are not able to resist, which, at least, are very potent with such as we?" And even, "Why did God make us thus? Why, if He is good, did He permit evil to exist?"

Or take the fact of *God*. "If there are many indications in the world around us that He is all-wise, all-good, almighty, are there not many facts which imply, or seem to imply, some limitation either of his goodness or his power? Why has He not made it impossible for us to doubt Him, and revealed Himself clearly, to all men, from the first?"

Take the revelation He *has*, at last, made in the life and teaching of Christ, and you may raise a hundred such questions as these:—"In what sense is the New Testament inspired? Were its several Scriptures written by the men to whom they are commonly ascribed? How could Christ be at once God and man? and what if, while I recognize in Him and reverence all that is best in humanity, and therefore much that is divine, I cannot admit his 'proper deity'?"

Once begin to ask such questions as these, and there is no end to them ; there is no answer to them in which all good men will agree : some of them, perchance, cannot be answered in the terms of our mortality, or cannot be so answered that we can grasp the answer while we wear flesh about us. And, meantime, what are you doing if you suffer yourselves to be unduly absorbed by these questions? You are simply being drawn away from the use and the enjoyment of the simple facts and verities which have approved themselves to your judgment and conscience. Lost in an endless maze of speculation, to which there is no sure clue, you are only too likely to neglect the plain duties of your daily life.

Am I, then, of all men, crying down the use of reason on the facts and truths of Religion? Let the tone and spirit of my whole ministry among you reply. I have been doing nothing for the last quarter of a century if I have not been leading you toward a more reasonable and verifiable, a more genial and generous, conception of divine truth. What, indeed, have we been doing for the last few weeks I am to spend with you but trying, by aid of St. Paul, to frame some coherent and adequate theory of the rela-

tions of Nature, of "the whole creation," to God, and to Man, and so to provide ourselves with a working answer to some of the profoundest questions over which men brood and contend? No, I am not decrying the use of reason ; I am only reminding you that the simple facts and verities of religious thought and experience are the very staple and food of your life, and warning you against such an abuse of reason as would lead you to lose or relax your hold on them. What fact in Nature, or in daily life, is so simple but that it rests on mysteries some of which Science has discovered indeed, but the deepest of which it confesses its inability to reach, and about which even a child may ask questions which no sage can answer? And he who so broods over the mysteries which underlie the simple facts of Religion as to forget that he is a sinner, and that God is a loving Father and Redeemer, whose aid he needs for the daily conduct of life, is like a man who forgets to use his eyes for guidance in his daily walk while pondering over the mysteries of light and colour and form ; he is like one who should refuse to take his necessary food until he had mastered the whole process and mystery of digestion.

What I want to bring home to you is the

vanity and the waste of beating out our brains against insoluble mysteries to the neglect of those simple facts and truths on which all religious men are agreed, facts and truths which, if you commit yourself to them, will verify themselves ever more fully and graciously in your personal experience. Who would willingly resemble the man who would not believe a brick wall to be made of bricks until he ran his head against them? And yet, willing or unwilling, how many of us do resemble him? Who would willingly resemble the centipede in the fable?

The centipede was happy till
 One day the toad, in fun,
 Said, "Pray *which* leg goes after which?"
 This strained his mind to such a pitch,
 He lay distracted in a ditch,
 Considering *how* to run.

And yet there are many, I fear, who lie in the ditch of speculation and doubt, considering how to run when, if they would use their reason to better purpose, they might be cheerfully running in the ways of truth and goodness.

I should be quite content, my brethren, if my last service to you—should it prove the last—were to urge you to *run* in the way of life, rather

than to too curiously consider *how* to run. And hence I would say to you :—

1. Do you hold an orthodox creed from which you are unwilling to part, though you suspect it at times of being a little dry and musty and antiquated? There is no reason why you should part with it if only it does not exclude the simple facts and verities of which I have spoken, and by dwelling on which you may give your old creed a new life. If you confess your sin and weakness, confess that you are not what you ought to be and cannot do the thing you would, and yet believe in the fatherly redeeming love of a God who will pardon your sins, who *has* pardoned them, and who will free you from all faults, and make you not only what you would fain become, but what He Himself would have you to be ; if these simple facts and truths are wrought into the very stuff and substance of your daily life, all is well with you ; your creed will serve : and all that is to be regretted in it is aught which obscures these facts or hinders you in this life.

2. Do any of you hold, or think you hold, a new and larger creed, a wider and more genial theology? Why, all is well with you too if only this new creed is not so large that the simple

facts and verities which are the basis of all true piety are lost in it; if you confess and repent your sins, and the infirmity of nature from which they spring, and trust in the redeeming love of your Father in heaven to deliver you from your sins, and to recreate you in the image of his Son.

3. Are any of you of an inquiring and sceptical spirit, which prompts you to prove all things? All is well with you also if, proving all things, you hold fast that which is good—good for daily life and practice; if, conscious of your sin and weakness, you have made the fatherly and redeeming God your refuge and strength. Think as boldly and as deeply as you can. Take all truth for your province, if you think you can cover and occupy that wide domain. Have no fear of truth, in whatever form or way it may come to you. Only, in your thinking, do not lose sight of the simple practical realities which have approved themselves to your experience: do not relax your grasp on them, nor neglect to run in the beaten paths of duty while “considering how to run.”

Of this you may all be sure that no theological theory, whether yours or mine, whether of this Church or of that, will cover and explain all the

facts and truths of Religion, or solve all the mysteries which underlie them. Be modest, therefore, and wholly refuse to believe that the very truth, the truth as it is known to God, is your private possession, or that those who differ from you in thought and speculation, while they are at one with you in life and conduct, necessarily differ from *Him* because they differ from you. And be thankful as well as modest—thankful that all that is essential to life and salvation is held by every Church, however adulterated it may be with the fond inventions of men, or overlaid with the dusty superstitions of bye-gone years.

Why should we be so impatient, so bent on an instant apprehension of all mysteries? We have plenty of time before us, plenty of time. If we are mortal, we are also immortal. We have all eternity in which to find an answer to the questions which perplex us, and to reach that coherent and comprehensive theory which will adequately explain all that now baffles and eludes us. Let us be more patient, content to wait, and to serve while we wait. Let us fix our main thoughts on the facts and verities which are well within our reach, and make it our main endeavour to render them a practical and growing obedience.

Patient ! Content ! Ah, how happy we should be, and how united, if only we *could* live in these large, lucid, and sustaining simplicities of truth and righteousness, instead of busying ourselves overmuch with the mysteries that underlie them, our partial and defective solutions of which we are so ready to embody in creeds and forms which divide the Church of Christ, in place of making us all one ! No good man would be excluded from a Church which was content with the essentials of religious thought and experience, and which left every man free to formulate his own theories and explanations of them. And of what worth after all are our theories of Inspiration or of the Atonement, our schemes of doctrine and our plans of salvation, as compared with the truths which are common to us all ? Who that has to deal with an aroused conscience, a distracted mind, a troubled heart, but instinctively falls back on the simple verities we all believe, and pushes aside as vain and helpless the refinements and deductions of theological dogma and speculation ?

And how *can* any man live without them in this world of change and sorrow, with a new sense of our guilt and weakness rising up within us at every turn, and of our need of a God and

Father who loves us all, and takes thought for us all, and will save us all as soon as, and in the very measure in which, we put our trust in Him?

Of those who were members of this Christian Church when I became its pastor—nearly two hundred, as I reckon—only thirteen are now left among us. Think of the pain, the sorrow, the sense of loss, the pangs of separation and bereavement, involved in the fact that nearly a whole generation of godly men and women has passed away from earth in a quarter of a century. Think of the strange, tragic, heroic death over which the whole civilized world mourns to-day,¹ of the grief, the defeats of hope, the fear of change, which it has bred in myriads of hearts. Where can, where do, we look for consolation and support under such heavy blows as these? Not to the subtleties and speculations over which we wrangle and divide, but to those simple common truths which we all hold, and which we have verified for ourselves,—to that trust in the Father and Redeemer who has us all in his love, under his care, who is ever evolving a more perfect and abiding good from seeming ill; without whom not even a sparrow can fall to the ground, and who, we may be sure, will

¹ June 17, 1888.

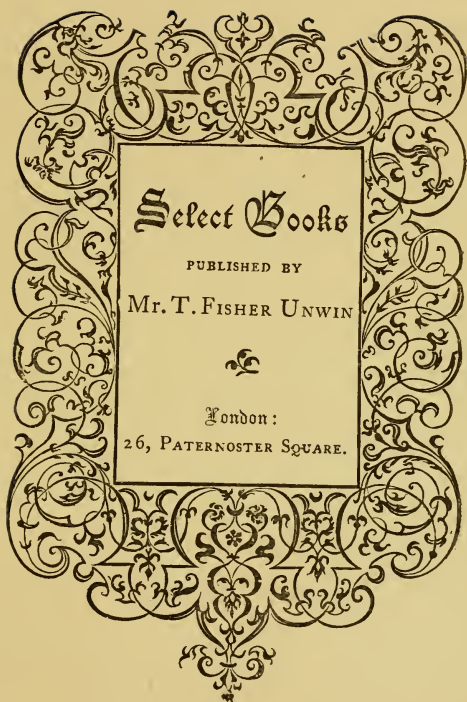
not suffer any real harm to come to any who put their trust in Him, however defective their knowledge of Him may be. In these truths, then, let us believe ; in this God let us confide.

“ Finally, brethren, farewell.” I have received much kindness from you, through many years,—kindness which I can never forget. You will always be in my prayers, as I trust that I shall be in yours. Your welfare will be as dear to me as my own ; for indeed it is my own, since I leave so much of my life and work in your hands. May God and our Father bless you all, and cause his face to shine upon you, that you may be fruitful in every good word and work. “ Farewell. Be perfected ; be comforted ; be of one mind ; live in peace : and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

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